

THE  
GILDED  
CHAIR

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MELVILLE·DAVISSON·POST

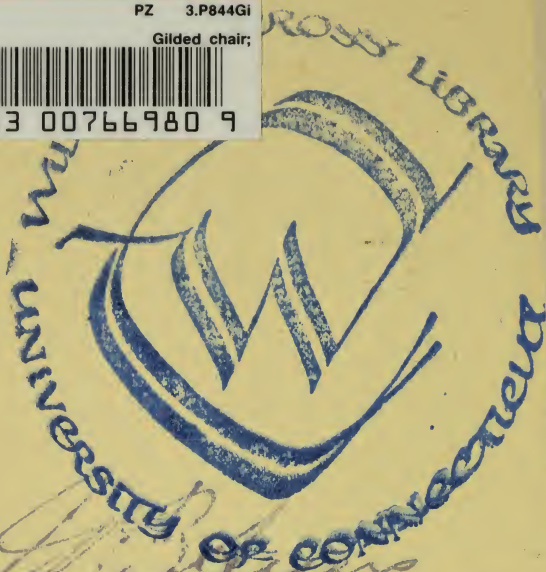
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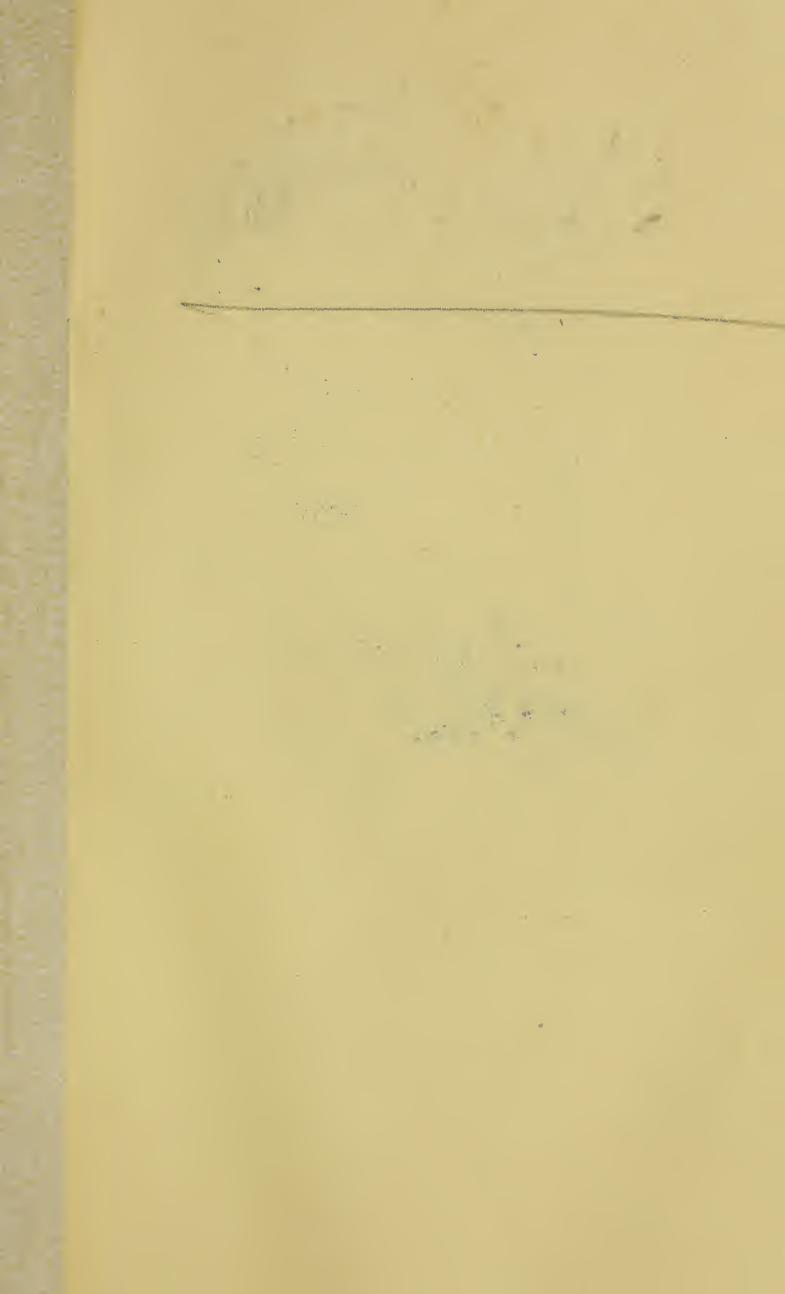
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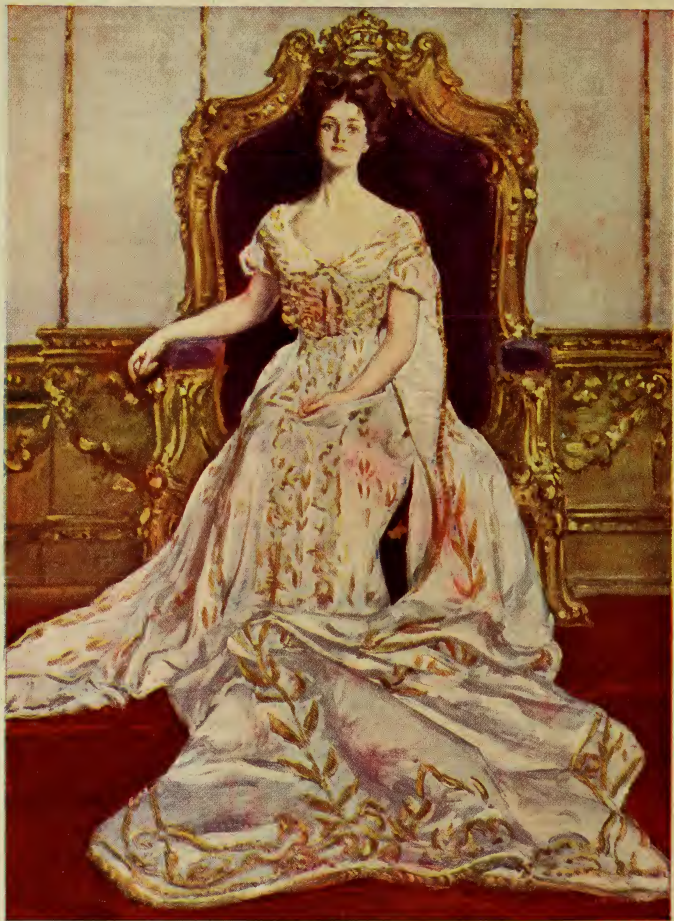




**THE  
GILDED CHAIR**







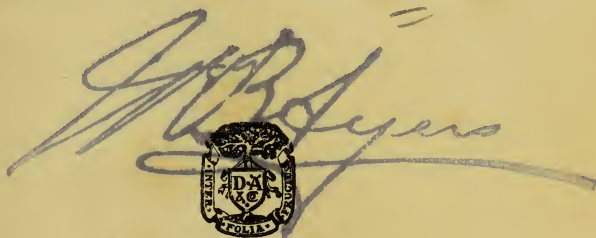
*Painted by A. B. Wenzell.*

# THE GILDED CHAIR

*A NOVEL*

BY

MELVILLE DAVISSON POST



ILLUSTRATED BY

A. B. WENZELL AND ARTHUR E. BECHER

NEW YORK AND LONDON  
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY  
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TO  
CAROLINE



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# THE GILDED CHAIR

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## CHAPTER I

### THE TRAVELER

WHEN the train crept out of Euston into the wet night the Marchesa Soderrelli sat for a considerable time quite motionless in the corner of her compartment. The lights, straggling northward out of London, presently vanished. The hum and banging of passing engines ceased. The darkness, attended by a rain, descended.

Beside the Marchesa, on the compartment seat, as the one piece of visible luggage, except the two rugs about her feet, was a square green leather bag, with a flat top, on which were three gold letters under a coronet. It was perhaps an hour before the Marchesa Soderrelli moved. Then it was to open this bag, get out a cigarette case, select a cigarette, light it, and resume her place in the corner of the compartment. She

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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was evidently engaged with some matter to be deeply considered; her eyes widened and narrowed, and the muscles of her forehead gathered and relaxed.

The woman was somewhere in that indefinite age past forty. Her figure, straight and supple, was beginning at certain points to take on that premonitory plumpness, realized usually in middle life; her hair, thick and heavy, was her one unchanged heritage of youth; her complexion, once tender and delicate, was depending now somewhat on the arts. The woman was coming lingeringly to autumn. Her face, in repose, showed the freshness of youth gone out; the mouth, straightened and somewhat hardened; the chin firmer; there was a vague irregular line, common to persons of determination, running from the inner angle of the eye downward and outward to the corner of the mouth; the eyes were drawn slightly at the outer corners, making there a drooping angle.

Her dress was evidently continental, a coat and skirt of gray cloth; a hat of gray straw, from which fell a long gray veil; a string of



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## *The Traveler*

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pearls around her neck, and drop pearl earrings.

As she smoked, the Marchesa continued with the matter that perplexed her. For a time she carried the cigarette mechanically to her lips, then the hand holding it dropped on the arm of the compartment seat beside her. There the cigarette burned, sending up a thin wisp of smoke.

The train raced north, gliding in and out of wet blinking towns, where one caught for a moment a dimly flashing picture of a wet platform, a few trucks, a smoldering lamp or two, a weary cab horse plodding slowly up a phantom street, a wooden guard, motionless as though posed before a background of painted cardboard, or a little party of travelers, grouped wretchedly together at a corner of the train shed, like poor actors playing at conspirators in some first rehearsal.

Finally the fire of the cigarette touched her fingers. She ground the end of it against the compartment window, sat up, took off her hat and placed it in the rack above her head; then

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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she lifted up the arm dividing her side of the compartment into two seats, rolled one of her rugs into a pillow, lay down, and covering herself closely with the remaining rug, was almost immediately asleep.

The train arrived at Stirling about 7:30 the following morning. The Marchesa Soderrelli got out there, walked across the dirty wooden platform—preëmpted almost exclusively by a flaming book stall, where the best English author finds himself in the same sixpenny shirt with the worst—out a narrow way by the book-office, and up a long cobble-paved street to an inn that was doubtless sitting, as it now sits, in the day of the Pretender.

A maid who emerged from some hidden quarter of this place at the Marchesa's knocking on the window of the office led the way to a little room in the second story of the inn, set the traveler's bag on a convenient chair, and, as if her duties were then ended, inquired if Madam wished any further attendance. The Marchesa Soderrelli wished a much further attendance, in

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## *The Traveler*

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fact, a continual attendance, until her breakfast should be served at nine o'clock. The tin bath tub, round like a flat-bottomed porringer, was taken from its decorative place against the wall and set on a blanket mat. The pots over the iron crane in the kitchen of the inn were emptied of hot water. The maid was set to brushing the traveler's wrinkled gown. The stable boy was sent to the chemist to fetch spirits of wine for Madam's toilet lamp. The very proprietor sat by the kitchen fire polishing the Marchesa Soderrelli's boots. The whole inn, but the moment before a place abandoned, now hummed and clattered under the various requirements of this traveler's toilet.

The very details of this exacting service impressed the hostelry with the importance of its guest. The usual custom of setting the casual visitor down to a breakfast of tea, boiled eggs, finnan haddock, or some indefinite dish with curry, in the common dining room with the flotsam of lowland farmers, was at once abandoned. A white cloth was laid in the long dining room of the second floor, open only from

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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June until September, while the tourist came to do Stirling Castle under the lines of his Baedeker, a room salted for the tourist, as a Colorado mine is salted for an Eastern investor. No matter in what direction one looked he met instantly some picture of Queen Mary, some old print, some dingy steel engraving. No two of these presented to the eye the same face or figure of this unhappy woman, until the observer came presently to realize that the Scottish engraver, when drawing the features of his central figure, like the Madonna painters of Italy, availed himself of a large and catholic collection.

To this room the innkeeper, having finished the Marchesa's boots, and while the maid still clattered up and down to her door, brought now the dishes of her breakfast. Porridge and a jug of cream, a dripping comb of heather honey, hot scones, a light white roll, called locally a "bap," and got but a moment before from the nearest baker, a mutton cutlet, a pot of tea, and a brown trout that but yesterday was swimming in the Forth.

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## *The Travele*

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When the Marchesa came in at nine o'clock to this excellent breakfast, every mark of fatigue had wholly vanished. Youth, vigor, freshness, ladies, once in waiting to this woman, ravished from her train by the savage days, were now for a period returned, as by some special, marked concession. The maid following behind her, the obsequious innkeeper, bowing by the door, saw and knew instantly that their estimate of the traveler was not a whit excessive. This guest was doubtless a great foreign lady come to visit the romantic castle on the hill, perhaps crossed from France with no object other than this pilgrimage.

The innkeeper waited, loitering about the room, moving here a candlestick and there a pot, until his prints, crowded on the walls, should call forth some comment. But he waited to disappointment. The great lady attended wholly to her breakfast. The "bap," the trout, the cutlet shared no interest with the prints. This man, skilled in divining the interests of the tourist, moved his pots without avail, his candlesticks to no seeming purpose. The Marchesa



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## *The Gilded Chair*

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Soderrelli was wholly unaware of his designing presence.

Presently, when the Marchesa had finished with her breakfast, she took up the silver case, which, in entering, she had put down by her plate, and rolling a cigarette a moment between her thumb and finger, looked about inquiringly for a means to light it. The innkeeper, marking now the arrival of his moment, came forward with a burning match and held it over the table—breaking on the instant, with no qualm, the fourth of his printed rules, set out for warning on the corner of his mantel shelf. He knew now that his guest would speak, and he sorted quickly his details of Queen Mary for an impressive answer. The Marchesa did speak, but not to that cherished point.

“Can you tell me,” she said, “how near I am to Doune in Perthshire?”

The innkeeper, set firmly in his theory, concluded that his guest wished to visit the neighboring castle after doing the one at Stirling, and answered, out of the invidious distinctions of a local pride.

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## *The Traveler*

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“Quite near, my Lady, twenty minutes by rail, but the castle there is not to be compared with ours. When you have seen Stirling Castle, and perhaps Edinburgh Castle, the others are not worth a visit. I have never heard that any royal person was ever housed at Doune. Sir Walter, I believe, gives it a bit of mention in ‘Waverley,’ but the great Bruce was in our castle and Mary Queen of Scots.”

He spoke the last sentence with uncommon gravity, and, swinging on his heel, indicated his engravings with a gesture. Again these prints failed him. The Marchesa’s second query was a bewildering tangent.

“Have you learned,” she said, “whether or not the Duke of Dorset is in Perthshire?”

“The Duke of Dorset,” he repeated, “the Duke of Dorset is dead, my Lady.”

“I do not mean the elder Duke of Dorset,” replied the Marchesa, “I am quite aware of his death within the year. I am speaking of the new Duke.”

The innkeeper came with difficulty from that subject with which his guns were shotted, and,

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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like all persons of his class, when turned abruptly to the consideration of another, he went back to some familiar point, from which to approach, in easy stages, the immediate inquiry.

“The estates of the Duke of Dorset,” he began, “are on the south coast, and are the largest in England. The old Duke was a great man, my Lady, a great man. He wanted to make every foreigner who brought anything over here, pay the government something for the right to sell it. I think that was it; I heard him speak to the merchants of Glasgow about it. It was a great speech, my Lady—I seemed to understand it then,” and he scratched his head. “He would have done it, too, everybody says, if something hadn’t broken in him one afternoon when he was with the King down at Ascot. But he never married. You know, my Lady, every once in a while, there is a Duke of Dorset who does not marry. They say that long ago, one of them saw a heathen goddess in a bewitched city by the sea, but something happened, and he never got her.”



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## *The Traveler*

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"That is very sad," said the Marchesa, "a fairy story should turn out better."

"But that is not the end of the story, my Lady," continued the innkeeper. "Right along after that, every other Duke has seen her, and won't have any mortal woman for a wife."

The Marchesa was amused. "So fine a devotion," she said, "ought to receive some compensation from heaven."

"And so it does, my Lady," cried the innkeeper, "and so it does. The brother's son who comes into the title, is always exactly like the old childless Duke—just as though he were re-born somehow." Then a light came beaming into his face. "My Lady!" he cried, like one arrived suddenly upon a splendid recollection. "I have a print of the old Duke just over the fireplace in the kitchen; I will fetch it. Janet, the cook, says that the new Duke is exactly like him."

The Marchesa stopped him. "No," she said, "I would not for the world disturb the decorations of your kitchen."

The thwarted host returned, rubbing his chin.

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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A moment or two he puzzled, then he ventured another hesitating service.

“If it please your Ladyship, I will ask Janet, the cook, about the new Duke of Dorset. Janet reads all about them every Sunday in the *Gentle Lady*, and she sticks a pin in the map to remind her where the nicest ones are.”

Before the smiling guest could interfere with a further negative, the obliging host had departed in search of that higher authority, presiding thus learnedly among his pots. The Marchesa, left to her devices, looked about for the first time at the innkeeper's precious prints. But she looked leisurely, without an attaching interest, until she chanced upon a little wood engraving of Prince Charles Edward Stuart, half hidden behind a luster bowl on the sideboard. She arose, took up the print, and returning to her chair, set it down on the cloth beside her. She was in leisurely contemplation of this picture when the innkeeper returned, sunning, from his interview with Janet. On the forty-three steps of his stairway the good man unfortunately lost the details of Janet's

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## *The Traveler*

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diction, but he came forth triumphant with the substance of her story.

The new Duke of Dorset was, at this hour, in Perthshire. He was not the son of the old Duke, but an only nephew, brought forth from some distant country to inherit his uncle's shoes. His father had married some Austrian, or Russian, or Italian—Janet was a bit uncertain on this trivial point. For the last half dozen years the young Duke had been knocking about the far-off edges of Asia. There had been fuss about his succession, and there might have been a kettle of trouble, but it came out that he had been of a lot of service to the government in effecting the Japanese alliance. He had somehow gotten at the inside of things in the East. So the foreign office was at his back. He had given up, too, some princely station in his mother's country; a station of which Janet was not entirely clear, but, in her mind, somehow, equal to a kingdom. But he gave it up to be a peer of England, as, in Janet's opinion, any reasonable person would. My Lady was rightly on her way, if she wished to see this new Duke.

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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The Doune Castle and the neighboring estate were shooting property of his father. This property, added to the vast holdings of the old Duke, made the new once perhaps the richest peer in England. He looked the part, too; more splendidly fit than any of his class coming under Janet's discriminating eye. She had gone with Christobel MacIntyre to see him pass through Stirling some weeks earlier. And he was one of the "nicest of them." Janet's pin had been sticking in Doune since August.

The Marchesa did not attempt to interrupt this pleasing flow of data. The innkeeper delivered it with a variety of bows, certain decorative, mincing steps, and illustrative gestures. It came forth, too, with that modicum of pride natural to one who housed, thus opportunely, so nice an observer as this Janet. He capped it at the end with a comment on this Japanese alliance. It did not please him. They were not white, these Japanese. And this alliance—it was against nature. His nephew, Donald MacKensie, had been with the army in China, when the powers marched on Peking, and there

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## *The Traveler*

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the British Tommy had divided the nations of the earth into three grand divisions, namely, niggers, white men, and dagoes. There were two kinds of niggers—real niggers, and faded-out niggers; there were four kinds of dagoes—vodka dagoes, beer-drinking dagoes, frog-eating dagoes, and the macaroni dagoes; but there was only one kind of white men—"Us," he said, "and the Americans."

The Marchesa laughed, and the innkeeper rounded off his speech with a suggestion of convenient trains, in case my Lady was pleased to go to-morrow or the following day to Doune. A good express left the station here at ten o'clock, and one could return—he marked especially the word—at one's pleasure. The schedule of returning trains was beautifully appointed.

He had arranged, too, in the interval of absence, for the Marchesa's comfort in the morning visit to Stirling Castle. A carriage would take her up the long hill; a guide, whom he could unreservedly recommend, would be there for any period at her service—a pensioned ser-

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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geant who had gone into the Zulu rush at Rorke's Drift, and come out somewhat fragmentary. Then he stepped back with a larger bow, like an orator come finally to his closing sentence. Was my Lady pleased to go now?

The Marchesa was pleased to go, but not upon the way so delicately smoothed for her. She arose, went at once to her room, got her hand bag and coat, paid the good man his charges, and walked out of the door, past the cab driver, to her train, leaving that expectant public servant, like the young man who had great possessions, sorrowing.



## CHAPTER II

### THE HOUSE OF THE FIRST MEN

ONE, arriving over the Caledonian railway at Doune, will at once notice how that station exceeds any other of this line in point of nice construction. The framework of the building is of steel; the roof, glass; the platform of broad cement blocks lying like clean gray bands along the car tracks. There is here no dirt, no smoke, no creaky floor boards, no obtrusive glaring bookstalls, and no approach given over to the soiling usages of trade. One goes out from the spotless shed into a gravel court, inclosed with a high brick wall, stone capped, planted along its southern exposure with pear trees, trained flat after the manner of the northern gardener.

The Marchesa Soderrelli, following the little street into the village, stopped in the public square at the shop of a tobacconist for a word of direction. This square is one of the old landmarks of Doune. In the center of it is a stone

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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pillar, capped at the top with a quaint stone lion, the work of some ancient cutter, to whom a lion was a fairy beast, sitting like a Skye dog on his haunches with his long tail jauntily in the air, and his wizened face cocked impudently.

From this square she turned east along a line of shops and white cottages, down a little hill, to an old stone bridge, crossing the Ardoch with a single high, graceful span. South of it stood the restored walls of Doune Castle, once a Lowland stronghold, protected by the swift waters of the Teith, now merely the most curious and the best preserved ruin in the North. East of the Ardoch the land rises into a park set with ancient oaks, limes, planes, and gnarled beeches. Here the street crossing the Ardoch ends as a public thoroughfare, and barred by the park gates, continues up the hill as a private road between two rows of plane trees.

The Marchesa opened the little foot gate, cut like a door in the wall of the park beside the larger gate, and walked slowly up the hill, over the dead plane leaves beginning now to fall. As she advanced the quaint split stone roof and



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## *The House of the First Men*

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high round wall of Old Newton House came prominently into view. This ancient house, one of the most picturesque in Scotland, deserves a word of comment. It was built in 1500 A.D., as a residence for the royal keepers of Doune Castle, and built like that castle with an eye forward to a siege. The stone walls are at some points five feet thick. The main wing of the house is flanked with a semicircular tower, capped with a round crow-step coping. The windows high up in the wall were originally barred with iron; the holes in the stones are still plainly visible. Under the east wing of the house is an arched dungeon with no ray of light; under the west wing, a well for the besieged. A secret opening in the wall of the third story descends under the Ardoch, it is said, to Doune Castle. To the left are the formal gardens inclosed by a tall holly hedge, and to the right, the green sward of the park. The road climbing the hill turns about into a gravel court.

The place is incrustated with legends. Prince Charlie on his daring march south with a

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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handful of Highlanders to wrest a kingdom from the Hanoverian, coming to this stone span by the Ardoch, was met at the park gate by the daughters of the house with a stirrup cup. He drank, as the story runs, and pulling off his glove put down his hand to kiss. But one mad-cap of the daughters answered, "I would rather prie your mou," and the Prince, kissing her like a sweetheart, rode over the Ardoch to his fortunes.

This old stronghold had originally but one way of entrance cut in the solid wall of the tower. An iron door, set against a wide groove of the stone, held it—barring against steel and fire. The door so low that one entering must stoop his head, making him thus ready for that other, waiting on the stairway with his ax.

This stone stairway ascending in the semicircular tower is one of the master conceptions of the old-time builder. Each step is a single fan-shaped stone, five inches thick, with a round end like a vertebra. These round ends of the stones are set one above the other, making thus a solid column, of which the flat part of each

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## *The House of the First Men*

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stone is a single step of a spiral stairway. The early man doubtless took here his plan direct from nature, in contemplation of the backbone of a stag twisted about, and going thus to the great Master for his lesson, his work, to this day, has not been bettered. His stairway was as solid and enduring as his wall, with no wood to burn and no cemented joint to crumble.

The Marchesa, having come now to the gravel court before the iron door, found there the brass knob of a modern bell. At her ringing, a footman crossed the court from the service quarter of the house, took her card and disappeared. A moment later he opened the creaking door and led the way up the stone stair into a little landing, a sort of miniature *entresol*, to the first floor of the house. This cell, made now to do service as a hall, was lighted by a square window, cut in modern days through the solid masonry of the tower. In the corner of it was a rack for walking sticks, and on the row of brass hooks set into the wall were dog whips, waterproofs, a top riding coat, and several shooting capes, made of that rough tweed, hand

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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spun and hand woven, by the peasants of the northern islands, dyed with crotal and heather tips, and holding yet faintly the odor of the peat smoke in which it was laboriously spun.

The footman now opened the white door at the end of this narrow landing, and announced the Marchesa Soderrelli. As the woman entered a man arose from a chair by a library table in the middle of the room.

To the eye he was a tall, clean-limbed Englishman, perhaps five and thirty; his fair hair, thick and close cropped, was sunburned; his eyes, clear and hard, were dark-blue, shading into hazel; his nose, aquiline in contour, was as straight and clean cut as the edges of a die; his mouth was strong and wide; his face lean and tanned. Under the morning sunlight falling through the high window, the man was a thing of bronze, cast in some old Tuscan foundry, now long forgotten by the Arno.

The room was that distinctive chamber peculiar to the English country house, a man's room. On the walls were innumerable trophies; elk

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## *The House of the First Men*

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from the forests of Norway, red deer from the royal preserves of Prussia, the great branching antlers of the Cashmire stag, and the curious ebon horns of the Gaur, together with old hunting prints and pencil drawings of big game. On the floor were skins. The buffalo, found only in the vast woodlands of Lithuania; the brown bear of Russia, the Armenian tiger. Along the east wall were three rows of white bookshelves, but newly filled; on a table set before these cases were several large volumes apparently but this day arrived, and as yet but casually examined. To the left and to the right of the mantel were gun cases built into the wall, old like the house, with worn brass keyholes, and small diagonal windows of leaded glass, through which one could see black stocks and dark-blue barrels.

Over the mantel in a smoke-stained frame was a painting of the old Duke of Dorset, at the morning of his life, in the velvet cap and the long red coat of a hunter. The face of the painting was, in every detail, the face of the man standing now below it, and the Marchesa



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## *The Gilded Chair*

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observed, with a certain wonder, this striking verification of the innkeeper's fantastic story.

On the table beside the leather chair from which the man had arisen were the evidences of two conflicting interests. A volume of political memoirs, closed, but marked at a certain page with the broad blade of a paper cutter—shaped from a single ivory tusk, its big gray handle pushing up the leaves of the book—and beside it, the bolt thrown open, the flap of the back sight pulled up, was a rifle.

An observer entering could not say, on the instant, with which of these two interests that one at the table had been latest taken. Had he gone, however, to the books beyond him on the wall, he might have fixed in a way the priority of those interests. The thick volumes on the table were the political memoirs of the late Duke of Dorset. The newer books standing in the shelves were exclusively political and historical, having to do with the government of England, speeches, journals, essays, memoirs, the first sources of this perplexing and varied knowledge; while the older, worn volumes, found

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## *The House of the First Men*

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now and then among them, were records of big-game shooting, expeditions into little known lands, works rising to a scientific accuracy on wild beast stalking, the technic of the rifle, the flight and effect of the bullet, and all the varied gear of the hunter. It would seem that the master of this house, having for a time but one consuming interest in his life, had come now upon a second.

The Duke of Dorset advanced and extended his hand to the woman standing in the door.

"It is the Marchesa Soderrelli," he said; "I am delighted."

The words of the man were formal and courteous, but colored with no visible emotion; a formula of greeting rather, suited equally to a visitor from the blue or one coming, with a certain claim upon the interest, from the nether darkness. The hospitality of the house was presented, but the emotions of the host retained.

The Marchesa put her gloved fingers for a moment into the man's hand.

"I hope," she answered, "that I do not too greatly disturb you."

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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"On the contrary, Madam," replied the Duke, "you do me a distinction." Then he led her to his chair, and took another at the far end of the table. He indicated the book, the rifle, with a gesture.

"You find me," he said, "in council with these conflicting symbols. Permit me to remove them."

"Pray do not," replied the Marchesa, smiling; "I attach, like Pompey, a certain value to the flight of birds. Signs found waiting at the turn of the road affect me. Those articles have to me a certain premonitory value."

"They have to me," replied the Duke, "a highly symbolic value. They are signposts, under which I have been standing, somewhat like a runaway lad, now on one foot and now on the other." Then he added, as in formal inquiry, "I hope, Madam, that the Marquis Soderrelli is quite well."

A cloud swept over the woman's face. "He is no longer in the world," she said.

The man saw instantly that by bungling inad-



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## *The House of the First Men*

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vertence he had put his finger on a place that ached. This dissolute Italian Marquis was finally dead then. And fragments of pictures fitted for a moment through the background of his memory. A woman, young, beautiful, but like the spirit of man—after the figure of Epic-tetus—chained invisibly to a corpse. He saw the two, as in a certain twilight, entering the Hotel Dardanelle in Venice; the two coming forth from some brilliant Viennese café, and elsewhere in remote Asiatic capitols, always followed by a word, pitying the tall, proud girl to whom a sardonic destiny had given such beauty and such fortune. The very obsequious clerks of the Italian consulate, to which this Marquis was attached, named him always with a deprecating gesture.

The Duke's demeanor softened under the appealing misery of these fragments. He blamed the thoughtless word that had called them up. Still he was glad, as that abiding sense of justice in every man is glad, when the oppressor, after long immunity, wears out at last the incredible patience of heaven. The Marquis had

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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got, then, the wage which he had been so long earning.

The Duke sought refuge in a conversation winging to other matters. He touched the steel muzzle of the rifle lying on the table.

“You will notice,” he said, “that I do not abandon myself wholly to the memoirs of my uncle. I am going out to Canada to look into the Japanese difficulties that we seem to have on our hands there. And I hope to get a bit of big-game shooting. I have been trying to select the proper rifle. Usually, after tramping about for half a day, one gets a single shot at his beast, and possibly, not another. He must, therefore, not only hit the beast with that shot, but he must also bring him down with it. The problem, then, seems to be to combine the shock, or killing power, of the old, big, lead bullet with the high velocity and extreme accuracy of the modern military rifle. With the Mauser and the Lee-Enfield one can hit his man or his beast at a great distance, but the shock of the bullet is much less than that of the old, round, lead one. The military bullet simply drills a

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## *The House of the First Men*

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little clean hole which disables the soldier, but does not bring down the beast, unless it passes accurately through some vital spot. I have, therefore, selected what I consider to be the best of these military rifles, the Mannlicher of Austrian make, and by modifying the bullet, have a weapon with the shock or killing power of the old 4:50 black powder Express."

The man, talking thus at length with a definite object, now paused, took a cartridge out of the drawer of the table, and set it down by the muzzle of the rifle.

"You will notice," he said, "that this is the usual military cartridge, but if you look closer you will see that the nickel case of the bullet has four slits cut near the end. Those simple slits in the case cause the bullet, when it strikes, to expand. The scientific explanation is that when the nose of the projectile meets with resistance, the base of it, moving faster, pushes forward through this now weakened case and expands the diameter of the bullet, and so long as this resistance to the bullet continues, the expansion

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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continues until there is a great flattened mass of spinning lead."

The Marchesa Soderrelli, visualizing the terrible effect of such a weapon, could not suppress a shudder.

"The thing is cruel," she said.

"On the contrary," replied the man, "it is humane. With such a bullet the beast is brought down and killed. Nothing is more cruel than to wound an animal and leave it to die slowly, or to be the lingering prey of other beasts."

The Duke of Dorset spun the cartridge a moment on the table, then he tossed it back into the drawer.

"I fear," he said, "that I cannot bring quite the same measure of enthusiasm to the duties of this new life. The great mountains, the vast wind-scoured Steppes allure me. I have lived there when I could. I suppose it is this English blood." Again smiling, he indicated the pile of volumes beyond him by the bookcase. "But I have, happily, the assistance of my uncle."

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## *The House of the First Men*

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The Marchesa took instant advantage of this opening.

"You are very fortunate," she said; "most of us are taken up suddenly by the Genii of circumstance and set down in an unknown land without a hand to help us."

The Duke's face returned to its serious outlines. "I do not believe that," he said; "there is always aid."

"In theory, yes," replied the Marchesa, "there is always food, clothing, shelter; but to that one who is hungry, ragged, cold, it is not always available."

"The tongue is in one's head," answered the Duke; "one can always ask."

"No," said the woman, "one cannot always ask. It is sometimes easier to starve than to ask for the loaf lying in the baker's window."

"I have tried starving," replied the Duke; "I went for two days hungry in the Bjelowjesha forest; on the third day I begged a wood chopper for his dinner and got it. I broke my leg once trying to follow a wounded beast into one of those inaccessible peaks of the Pusiko. I



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## *The Gilded Chair*

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crawled all that night down the mountain to the hut of a Cossack, and there I begged him, literally begged him for his horse. I had nothing; I was a dirty mass of blood and caked earth; it was pure primal beggary. I got the horse. The heart in every man, when one finally reaches to it, is right. In his way, at the bottom of him, one is always pleased to help. The pride, locking the tongue of the unfortunate, is false."

"Doubtless," replied the Marchesa, "in a state of nature, such a thing is easy. But I do not mean that. I mean the humiliation, the distress, of that one forced by circumstance to appeal to an equal or a superior for aid—perhaps to a proud, arrogant, dominating person in authority."

"I have done that, too," replied the Duke, "and I still live. Once in India I came upon a French explorer of a helpless, academic type. He had come into the East to dig up a buried city, and the English Resident of the native state would not permit him to go on. He had put his whole fortune into the preparation for

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## *The House of the First Men*

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the work, and I found him in despair. I went to the Resident, a person of no breeding, who endeavored, like all those of that order, to make up for this deficiency with insolence. I was ordered to wait on the person's leisure, to explain in detail the explorer's plan, literally to petition the creature. It was not pleasant, but in the end I got it; and I rather believe that this Resident was not, at bottom, the worst sort, after one got to the real man under his insolence."

The Marchesa recalled vaguely some mention of this incident in a continental paper at the time.

"But," she said, "that was aid asked for another. That is easy. It is aid asked for oneself that is crucifixion."

"If," replied the Duke, "any man had a thing which I desperately needed, I should have the courage to ask him for it."

A tinge of color flowed up into the woman's face.

"I thought that, too," she said, "until I came into your house this morning."

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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The Duke leaned forward and rested his elbows on the table.

"Have I acted then, so much like that English Resident?" he said. The voice was low, but wholly open and sincere.

"Oh, no," replied the Marchesa, "no, it is not that."

"Then," he said, "you will tell me what it is that I can do."

The woman's color deepened. "It is so common, so sordid," she said, "that I am ashamed to ask."

"And I," replied the Duke, "shall be always ashamed if you do not. I shall feel that by some discourtesy I have closed the lips of one who came trusting to a better memory of me. What is it?"

The woman's face took on a certain resolution under its color. "I have come," she said, "to ask you for money."

The Duke's features cleared like water under a lifting fog. He arose, went into an adjoining room, and returned with a heavy pigskin dispatch case. He set the case on the table,



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## *The House of the First Men*

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opened it with a little brass key, took out a paper blank, wrote a moment on it and handed it with the pen to the Marchesa. The woman divining that he had written a check did not at first realize why he was giving her the pen. Then she saw that the check was merely dated and signed and left blank for her to fill in any sum she wished. She hesitated a moment with the pen in her fingers, then wrote "five hundred pounds."

The Duke, without looking at the words that the Marchesa had written, laid the check face downward on a blotter, and ran the tips of his fingers over the back to dry the ink. Then he crossed to the mantel, and pulled down the brass handle of the bell. When the footman entered, he handed the check to him, with a direction to bring the money at once. Then he came back, as to his chair, but pausing a moment at the back of it, followed the footman out of the room.

A doubt of the man's striking courtesy flitted a moment into the woman's mind. Had he gone, then, after this delicate unconcern, to see what

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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sum she had written into the body of the check? She arose quickly and looked out of the high window. What she saw there set her blushing for the doubt. The footman was already going down the road to the village. She was hardly in her chair, smarting under the lesson, when the Duke returned.

"I have taken the liberty to order a bit of luncheon," he said. "This village is not celebrated for its inn."

The Marchesa wished to thank him for this new courtesy, but she felt that she ought to begin with some word about the check, and yet she knew, as by a subtle instinct, that she could not say too little about it.

"You are very kind," she said, "I thank you for this money"; and swiftly, with a deft movement of the fingers, she undid the strand of pearls at her throat, and held it out across the table. "Until I can repay it, please put this necklace in the corner of your box."

The Duke put her hand gently back. "No," he said, his mouth a bit drawn at the corners, "you must not make a money lender of me."

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## *The House of the First Men*

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“And you,” replied the Marchesa, “must not make a beggar of me. I must be permitted to return this money or I cannot take it.”

“Certainly,” replied the Duke, “you may repay me when you like, but I will not take security like a Jew.”

The butler, announcing luncheon, ended the controversy.

## CHAPTER III

### THE HERMIT'S CRUST

THE Marchesa passed through the door held open by the butler, across a little stone passage, into the dining room.

This room was in structure similar to the one she had just quitted, except for the two long windows cut through the south wall—flood gates for the sun. The table was laid with a white cloth almost to the floor. In the center of it was a single silver bowl, as great as a peck measure, filled with fruit, an old massive piece, shaped like the hull of a huge acorn, the surface crudely cut to resemble the outside of that first model for his cup, which the early man found under the oak tree. The worn rim marked the extreme antiquity of this bowl. Somewhere in the faint dawn of time, a smith, melting silver in a pot, had cast the clumsy outline of the piece in a primitive sand mold on the floor of his shop, and then sat down

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## *The Hermit's Crust*

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with his model—picked up in the forest—before him on his bench, to cut and hammer the outside as like to nature as he could get it with his tools—the labor of a long northern winter; and then, when that prodigious toil was ended, to grind the inside smooth with sand, rubbed laboriously over the rough surface. But his work remained to glorify his deftness ages after his patient hands were dust. It sat now on the center of the white cloth, the mottled spots, where the early smith had followed so carefully his acorn, worn smooth with the touching of innumerable fingers.

At the end of the room was a heavy rosewood sideboard, flanked at either corner by tall silver cups—trophies, doubtless, of this Duke of Dorset—bearing inscriptions not legible to the Marchesa at the distance. The luncheon set hastily for the unexpected guest was conspicuously simple. The butler, perhaps at the Duke's direction, did not follow into the dining room. The host helped the guest to the food set under covers on the sideboard. Cold grouse, a glass of claret, and later, from the

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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huge acorn, a bunch of those delicious white grapes grown under glass in this north country.

The Duke, having helped the Marchesa to the grouse, sat down beyond her at the table, taking out of courtesy a glass of wine and a biscuit.

"You will pardon this hunter's luncheon," he said; "I did not know how much leisure you might have."

"I have quite an hour," replied the Marchesa; "I go on to Oban at twenty minutes past one."

The answer set the man to speculating on the object of this trip to Oban. He did not descend to the commonplace of such a query, but he lifted the gate for the Marchesa to enter if she liked.

"The bay of Oban," he said, "is thought to be one of the most beautiful in the world. I believe it is a meeting place for yachts at this season."

The Marchesa Soderrelli returned a bit of general explanation. "I believe that a great number of yachts come into the harbor for the Oban Gathering," she answered; "it is considered rather smart for a day or two then."



"I had forgotten the Oban Gathering for the moment," said the Duke. "Does it not seem rather incongruous to attend land games with a fleet of yachts? The Celt is not a person taking especially to water in any form but rain."

The Marchesa laughed. "It is the rich wanderer who comes in with his yacht."

"I wonder why it is," replied the Duke, "that we take usually to the road in the extremes of wealth and poverty. The instinct of vagrancy seems to dominate a man when necessity emancipates him."

"I think it is because the great workshop is not fitted with a lounging room," said the Marchesa, "and, so, when one is paid off at the window, he can only go about and watch the fly wheels spin. If there is a little flurry anywhere in the great shop he hurries to it." Then she added, "Have you ever attended a Northern Gathering?"

"No," replied the Duke, "but I may possibly go to Oban for a day of it."

The answer seemed to bring some vital matter strikingly before the Marchesa Soderrelli.

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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She put down her fork idly on the plate. She took up her glass of claret and drank it slowly, her eyes fixed vacantly on the cloth. But she could have arisen and clapped her hands. The gods, sitting in their spheres, were with her. The moving object of her visit was to get this man to Oban. And he was coming of himself! Surely Providence was pleased at last to fill the slack sails of her fortune.

Then a sense of how little this man resembled the popular conception of him, thrust itself upon her like a thing not until this moment thought of. He was a stranger, almost wholly unknown in England, but the title was known. Next to that of the reigning house it was the greatest in the Empire. The story of its descent to this new Duke of Dorset was widely known. The romance of it had reached even to that Janet, toasting scones in the innkeeper's kitchen. The story, issuing from every press in Europe, was colored like a tale of treasure. But it was vague as to the personality of this incoming Duke. He had been drawn for the reader wholly from the fancy. In the great



hubbub he had been painted—like that picture which she had examined in the innkeeper's dining room—young, handsome, a sort of fairy prince. The man, while the sensation ran its seven days, was hunting somewhere in the valley of the Saagdan on the Great Laba, inaccessible for weeks. The romance passed, turning many a pretty head with this new Prince Charlie, coming, as by some Arabian enchantment, to be the richest and the greatest peer in England. Other events succeeded to the public notice. The matter of the succession adjusted itself slowly under the cover of state portfolios, the steps of it coming out now and then in some brief notice. But the portrait of the new Duke remained, as the dreamers had created him, a swaggering, handsome, orphaned lad, moved back into an age of romance.

The reality sat now before the Marchesa Soderrelli in striking contrast to this fancy. A man of five and thirty, hard as the deck of a whale ship; his hair sunburned; the marks of the wilderness, the desert, the great silent

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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mountains stamped into his bronze face; his hands sinewy, callous; his eyes steady, with the calm of solitudes—an expression, common to the eye of every living thing dwelling in the waste places of the earth.

“You will come to Oban?” she said, putting down her cup and lifting her face, brightened with this pleasing news. “I am delighted. The Duke of Dorset will be a great figure at this little durbar. Perhaps on some afternoon there, when you are tired of bowing Highlanders, you will permit me to carry you off to an American yacht.” She paused a moment, smiling. “Now, that you are a great personage in England, you should give a bit of notice to great personages in other lands. The peace of the world, and all that, depends, we are told, on such social inter-mixing. I promise you a cup of tea with a most important person.” Then she laughed in a cheery note.

“You will pardon the way I run on. I do not really depend on the argument I am making. I ought rather to be quite frank; in fact, to say, simply, that an opportunity to present

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## *The Hermit's Crust*

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the Duke of Dorset to my friends will help me to make good a little feminine boasting. I confess to the weakness. When the romance of your succession to the greatest title in England was being blown about the world, I could not resist a little posing. I had seen you in various continental cities, now and then, and I boasted it a bit. I added, perhaps, a little color to your imaginary portrait. I stood out in the gay season at Biarritz as the only woman who actually knew this fairy prince. King Edward was there, and with him London and New York. You were the consuming topic, and this little distinction pleased my feminine vanity."

The Marchesa smiled again. "It seems infinitely little, doesn't it? And to a man it would be, but not so to a woman. A woman gets the pleasure of her life out of just such little things. You must not measure us in your big iron bushel. If you take away our little vanities, our flecks of egotism, our bits of fiction, you leave us with nothing by which we can manage to be happy. And so," she continued, lowering her eyes to the cloth and tapping the rim of the

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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plate with her fingers, "if the Duke of Dorset appears in Oban and does not know me, I am conspicuously pilloried."

It was not possible to determine from the man's face with what internal comment he took this feminine confession. He arose, filled the Marchesa's glass, set the decanter on the table, and returned to his chair; then he answered.

"If I should attend this Gathering," he said, "I will certainly do myself the honor of looking you up."

The words rang on the Marchesa Soderrelli like a rebuke descended from the stars. She might have saved herself the doubtful effect of her ingenuous confession.

The man's face gave no sign. He was still talking—words which the Marchesa, engrossed with the various aspects of her error, did not closely follow. He was going on to explain that he was just setting out for Canada, but if he had a day or two he would likely come to Oban. He was curious to see a Highland Gathering. And if he came he would be charmed to

know the Marchesa's friends—to see her again there, and so forth.

The Marchesa Soderrelli murmured some courteous platitudes, some vague apology, and arose from the table. The Duke held back the door for her to pass and then followed her into the next room. There the Marchesa, inquiring the hour, announced that she must go. She said the words with a bit of brightened color, with visible confusion, and remained standing, embarrassed, until the Duke should put into her hands the money which he had sent for. But he did not do it. He bade her a courteous adieu.

A certain sense of loss, of panic, enveloped her. This man had doubtless forgotten, but she could not remind him. She felt that such words rising now into her throat, would choke her. The butler stood there by the door. She walked over to it, bowed to the Duke remaining now by his table as he had been when she had first crossed the threshold; then she went out and slowly down the stone stairway, empty handed as she had come that morning up

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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it. At every step, clicking under her foot, the panic deepened. She had not two sovereigns remaining in her bag. She was going down these steps to ruin.

As the butler, preceding her, threw open the iron door to the court, she saw, in the flood of light thus admitted, a footman standing at the bottom of the stairway, holding a silver tray, and lying on it a big blue envelope sealed with a splash of red wax.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE MAIDEN OF THE WATERS

THE whine of innumerable sea gulls awoke the Marchesa Soderrelli. She arose and opened the white shutters of the window.

A flood of sun entered—the thin, brilliant, inspiring sun of the sub-Arctic. A sun to illumine, to bring out fantastic colors, to dye the sea, to paint the mountains, to lay forever on the human heart the mysterious lure of the North. A sun reaching, it would seem, to its farthest outpost. A faint sheet of the thinnest golden light, fading out into distant colors, as though here, finally, one came to the last shore of the world. Beyond the emerald rim of the distant water was utter darkness, or one knew not what twilight sea, sinister and mystic, undulating forever without the breaking of a wave crest, in eternal silence. Or beyond that blue, smoky haze holding back the sun, were to be found all those fabled countries for which the

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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human heart has desired unceasingly, where every man, landing from his black ship, finds the thing for which he has longed, upward from the cradle; that one bereaved, the dead glorified, and that one coming hard in avarice, red and yellow gold.

The bay of Oban on such a morning, under such a sun, surpasses in striking beauty the bay of Naples. The colors of the sea seem to come from below upward. The Firth of Lorn is then the vat of some master alchemist, wherein lies every color and every shade of color, varying with the light, the angle of incidence, the traveling of clouds; and yet, always, the waters of that vat are green, viscous, sinister. The rocks, rising out of this sea, look old, wrinkled, drab. The mountains, hemming it in, seem in the first lights of the morning covered loosely with mantles of worn, gray velvet—soft, streaked with great splashes of pink powder, as though some careless beauty had spilled her cosmetic over the cover of her table.

To the Marchesa Soderrelli, on this morning, the beauties of this north outpost of the world



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## *The Maiden of the Waters*

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were wholly lost. The whining of the gulls, of all sounds in the heaven above the most unutterably dreary, had brought her to the window, and there a white yacht, lying in the bay, held exclusively her attention. It was big, with two oval stacks; the burger of the Royal Highland Yacht Club floated from its foremast and the American flag from its jack staff. From its topmast was a variegated line of fluttering signals. Beyond, crowding the bay, were yachts of every prominent club in the world, from the airy, thin sailing craft with its delicate lines to the steamer with its funnels.

The woman, looking from this window, studied the triangular bits of silk descending from the topmast, like one turning about a puzzle which he used to understand. For a time the signal eluded her, then suddenly, as from some hidden angle, she caught the meaning. She laughed, closed the window, and began hurriedly with those rites by which a woman is transformed from the toilet of Godiva to one somewhat safer to the eye. When that work was ended she went down to the clerk's window,

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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gave a direction about her luggage, and walked out of the hotel along the sea wall to the beach. There the yacht's boat with two sailors lay beside a little temporary wooden pier, merely a plank or two on wooden horses. She returned the salute of the two men with a nod, stepped over the side, and was taken, under the flocks of gulls maneuvering like an army, to the yacht. But before they reached it the Marchesa Soderrelli put her hand into the water and dropped the silver case, that had been, heretofore, so great a consolation. It fled downward gleaming through the green water. She was a resolute woman, who could throttle a habit when there was need.

On the yacht deck a maid led the Marchesa down the stairway through a tiny salon fitted exquisitely, opened a white door, and ushered her into the adjoining apartment. This apartment consisted of two rooms and a third for the bath. The first which the Marchesa now entered was a dressing room, finished in white enamel, polished dull like ivory—old faintly colored ivory—an effect to be got

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## *The Maiden of the Waters*

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only by rubbing down innumerable coats of paint laboriously. The floor was covered with a silk oriental rug glistening like frost, lying as close to the planks as a skin. A beautiful dressing table was set into the wall below a pivot mirror; on this table were toilet articles in gold, carved with dryads, fauns, cupids, and piping satyrs in relief. A second table stood in the center of the room, covered with a cloth. Two mirrors, extending from the ceiling to the floor, were set into the walls, one opposite to the other. These walls were paneled in delicate rose-colored brocade.

The second room was a bedchamber, covered with a second of those rugs, upon which innumerable human fingers had labored, under a tropic sun, until age doubled them into their withered palms. The nap of this rug was like the deepest yielding velvet, and the colors bright and alluring. The first rug, with its shimmering surface, was evidently woven for a temple, a thing to pray on; but this second had been designed for domestic uses, under a sultan's eye, with nice discrimination, for a cherished foot.

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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This room contained a bedstead of inlaid brass and hangings of exquisite silk.

The ripple and splash of the bath told how the occupant of this dainty apartment was engaged—in green sea water like that Aphrodite of imperishable legend. Water, warmed by the trackless currents of the gulf, cooled by wandering ice floes; of mightier alchemy to preserve the gloss of firm white shoulders, and the alluring hues of bright, red blood glowing under a satin skin, than the milk of she asses, or the scented tubbings of Egypt.

The Marchesa Soderrelli entering was greeted by a merry voice issuing from the bath of splashing waters.

“Good morning,” said the voice, “could you read my signal?”

“With some difficulty,” replied the Marchesa; “one does not often see an invitation to breakfast dangling from a topmast.”

The voice laughed among the rippling waters.

“Old Martin was utterly scandalized when I ordered him to run it up, but Uncle had gone ashore somewhere, and I remained First Lord

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## *The Maiden of the Waters*

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of the Admiralty, so he could not mutiny. It was obey or go to the yardarm. For rigorous unyielding etiquette, give me an English butler or an American yacht captain."

"It was rather unconventional," replied the Marchesa.

"Quite so," the voice assented, "but at the same time it was a most practical way of getting you here promptly to breakfast with me. This place is crowded with hotels. I did not know in which of them you were housed, and it would have taken Martin half a day to present himself formally to all the hall porters in Oban."

Then the voice added, "I am breaking every convention this morning. I invite you to breakfast by signal, and I receive you in my bath."

"This latter is upon old and established authority, I think," replied the Marchesa. "It was a custom of the ancient ladies of Versailles, only you do not follow it quite to the letter. The bath door is closed."

"I am coming out," declared the voice.

"If you do," replied the Marchesa, "I shall



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## *The Gilded Chair*

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not close my eyes, even if they shrivel like those of that inquisitive burgher of poetic memory."

The voice laughed and the door opened.

It is quite as well perhaps that photography was unknown to the ancients; that the fame of reputed beauties rests solely upon certain descriptive generalities; words of indefinite and illusive meaning; various large and comprehensive phrases, into which one's imagination can fill such detail as it likes. If they stood before us uncovered to the eye, youth, always beautiful, would in every decade shame them with comparison. The historical detective, following his clew here and there among forgotten manuscripts, has stripped them already of innumerable illusions. We are told that Helen was forty when she eloped to Ilium, and, one fears, rather fat into the bargain; that Cleopatra at her heyday was a middle-aged mother; that Catherine of Russia was pitted with the small-pox; and, upon the authority of a certain celebrated Englishman, that every oriental beauty cooing in Bagdad was a load for a camel.

It is then the idea of perennial youth, associ-

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## *The Maiden of the Waters*

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ated by legend with these names, that so mightily affects us. As these beauties are called, it is always the slim figure of Daphne, of Ariadne, of Nicolette, as under the piping of Prospero, that rises to the eye—fresh color, slender limbs, breasts like apples—daughters of immortal morning, coming forth at dawn untouched as from the silver chamber of a chrysalis. It is youth that the gods love!

And it was youth, fresh, incomparable youth, that came now through the bath door. A girl packed yet into the bud; slender, a little tall, a little of authority, perhaps in the carriage of the head, a bit of hauteur maybe in the lifting of the chin—but gloriously young. Her hair, long, heavy, in two wrist-thick plaits, fell on either side of her face to her knees over a rose-colored bath robe of quilted satin. This hair was black; blue against the exquisite whiteness of the skin; purple against the dark-rose-colored quiltings. Her eyes, too, were black; but they were wide apart, open, and thereby escaped any suggestion of that shimmering, beady blackness of Castilian women. Their very size



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## *The Gilded Chair*

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made this feature perhaps too prominent in the girl's face. It is a thing often to be noticed, as though the eye came first to its maturity, and disturbed a little the harmony of features not yet wholly filled in. But it is a beauty to be had only from the cradle, and for that reason priceless.

"Oh, Caroline," cried the Marchesa, rising, "you are so splendidly, so gloriously young!"

The girl laughed. "It is a misfortune, Marchesa, from which I am certain to recover."

"Oh," continued the woman, drinking in the girl from her dainty feet, incased in quaint Japanese sandals, to the delicate contour of her bosom, showing above the open collar of the robe. "If only one could be always young, then one could, indeed, be always beautiful; but each year is sold to us, as it goes out it takes with it some bit of our priceless treasure, like evil fairies, stealing sovereigns from a chest, piece by piece, until the treasure is wholly gone."

She paused, as though caught on the instant by some returning memory of a day long van-

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## *The Maiden of the Waters*

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ished, when she saw, reflected from a glass, on such a morning, a counterpart of this splendid picture, only that girl's hair was gold, and her eyes gray, but she was slim, too, and brilliantly colored and alluring.

Then she continued: "The bit taken seems a very little, a strand of hair, a touch of color, the almost imperceptible lessening of a perfect contour, but in the end we are hags."

"Then," replied the girl, smiling, "I beg that I may become, in the end, such a hag as the Marchesa Soderrelli."

"Child," said the woman, still speaking as though moved by the inspiration of that picture, "beg only for youth, in your prayers, as the Apostle would say it, unceasingly. If you should be given a wish by the fairies, or three wishes, let them all be youth. Women arriving at middle life adhere to the Christian religion upon the promise of a resurrection of the body. Were that promise wanting, we should be, to the last one, pagans."

"But, Marchesa," replied the girl, "old, wise men tell us that the mind is always young."

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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There was something adverse to this wisdom in the girl's soft voice; a voice low, lingering, peculiar to the deliberate peoples of the South.

The Marchesa made a depreciating gesture. "My dear," she said, "what man ever loved a woman for her mind! What Prince Charming ever rode down from his enchanted palace to wed a learned prig, doing calculus behind her spectacles! The sight would set the sides of every god in his sphere shaking. It is always the lily lass, the dainty maiden of red blood and dreams, the slim youngling of gloss and porcelain that the Prince takes up, after adventures, into his saddle. Every man born into this world is at heart a Greek. Learning, cleverness, and wisdom he may greatly, he may extravagantly, admire, but it is beauty only that he loves. He may deny this with a certain heat, with well-turned and tripping phrases, with specious arguments to the ear sound, but, believe me for a wise old woman, it is a seizure of unconscionable lying."

A soft hand put for a moment into that of the

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## *The Maiden of the Waters*

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Marchesa, a wet cheek touched a moment to her face, brought her lecture abruptly to a close.

“I refuse,” replied the girl, laughing, “to do lessons before breakfast even under so charming a teacher as the Marchesa Soderrelli.”

Then she went into the bedchamber of the apartment, and sent a maid to order breakfast laid on the Buhl table in the dressing room. The maid returned, removed the cover, placed a felt pad over the exquisite face of the table, and on that a linen cloth with a clock center, and borders of Venetian point lace. Upon this the breakfast, brought in by a second maid, was set under silver covers. While these preparations went swiftly forward, the young woman, concerned with the details of her toilet, maintained a running conversation with the Marchesa Soderrelli.

“Did you find that fairy person, the Duke of Dorset?”

“Yes,” replied the Marchesa, “at Doune in Perthshire.”

“Charming! Will he come to Oban?”

“He will come,” answered the Marchesa.

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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“How lovely!” And then a volley of queries upon that alluring picture which the press of Europe had drawn in fancy of this mysterious Duke—queries which the inquisitive young woman herself interrupted by coming, at that moment, through the door. She now wore slippers and a dressing gown of silk, in hunters’ pink, embroidered with Japanese designs, but her hair in its two splendid plaits still hung on either side of her face, over the red folds of the gown, as they had done over the quiltings of the bath robe. She sat down opposite the Marchesa at the table, in the subdued light of this sumptuous apartment.

The picture thus richly colored, set under a yacht’s deck in the bay of Oban, belonged rather behind a casement window, opening above a blue sea, in some Arabian story. The beauty of the girl, the barbaric richness of the dressing gown, her dark, level eyebrows, the hair in its two plaits, were the distinctive properties of those first women of the earth glorified by fable. But the girl responding visibly to these ancient extravagances, was, in mental structure, aptly

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## *The Maiden of the Waters*

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fitted to her time. The wisdom of the débutante lay in her mouth.

“And now, Marchesa,” she said, balancing her fork on the tips of her fingers, “tell me all about him.”



## CHAPTER V

### THE GATHERING

THE Highland Gathering is a sort of northern durbar, and of an antiquity equaling those of India.

The custom of the Scottish clans to meet for a day of games, piping and parade, had its origin anterior to the running of the Gaelic memory. A durbar it may be called, and yet a contrast in that word cannot be laid here alongside the gorgeous pageant of Delhi. The word may stand, albeit, in either case equally descriptive. Both are Gatherings. The distinction lies not in the essential and moving motive of the function, but in the diametric differences of the races. The Orient contrasted against the North. The rajah in his cape of diamonds, attended by his retinue, stripped of his Eastern splendor, is but a chief accompanied by his "tail." The roll of skin drums is a music of no greater mystery to the stranger



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## *The Gathering*

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than the whine of pipes. The fakirs, the jugglers of India, disclose the effeminate nature of the East, while the games of the Highland disclose equally the hardy nature of the North.

Here under this cis-Arctic sun can be displayed no vestige of that dazzling splendor, making the oriental gathering a saturnalia of gems and color. But one will find in lieu of it hardy exhibitions of the strength, the courage, the endurance, the indomitable unflagging spirit that came finally to set an English Resident in every state of India.

The games of the Oban Gathering are in a way those to be seen at Fort William, Inverness, and elsewhere in the North; the simple sturdy contests of the first men, observed by Homer, and to be found in a varying degree among all peoples not fallen to decadence. Wrestling as it was done, doubtless, before Agamemnon; the long jump; the putting of the stone; the tossing of the caber, a section of a fir tree, and to be cast so mightily that it turns end over in the air, a feat of strength possible only to fingers thick as the coupling pins of a cart and sinews of

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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iron; the high vault, not that theatrical feat of a college class day, but a thing of tremendous daring, learned among the ice ledges of Buach-aill-Etive, when the man's life depended on the strength lying in his tendons. Contests, also, of agility, unknown to any south country of the world; the famous sword dance, demanding incredible swiftness and precision; the Sean Triubhais; the Highland fling, a Gaelic dance requiring limbs oiled with rangoon and strung with silk, a dance resembling in no heavy detail its almost universal imitation; a thing, light, fantastic, airy, learned from the elfin daughters dancing in the haunted glens of the Garry, from the kelpie women shaking their white limbs in the boiling pools of the Coe.

But it is not for these field sports that butterflies swarm into the bay of Oban. A certain etiquette requires, however, that one should go for half an hour to these games; an etiquette, doubtless, after that taking the indolent noble, once upon a time, to the Circus Maximus; having its origin in the custom of the feudal chiefs, to lend the splendor of their presence to these

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## *The Gathering*

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annual contests. One finds, then, on such a day, streams of fashionable persons strolling out to the field in which these games are held, and returning leisurely along the road to Oban. Adequate carriages cannot be had, and one goes afoot. The sun, the bright heaven, the gala air of the bedecked city, the color and distinctive dresses of the North, lend to the scene the fantastic charm of a masquerade.

At noon, on the second day of the Gathering, the Duke of Dorset came through the turnstile of the field into this road, following, at some paces, two persons everywhere conspicuously noticed. The two were of so strikingly a relation that few eyes failed to notice that fitness. The observers' interest arose at it wondering. In the fantastic gala mood of such a day, one came easily to see, passing here, in life, under his eye, that perfect sample of youth and age—that king and that king's daughter—of which the legend has descended to us through the medium of stories told in the corner by the fire. Those two running through every tale of mystery, coming now, unknown, as if by some en-

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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chantment. The girl, dark eyed, dark haired, smiling. Her white cloth gown fitting to her figure; her drooping hat loaded with flowers of a delicate blossom. The man, old, but unbent and unwithered, and walking beside her with a step that remained firm and elastic. He was three inches less in stature than the Duke of Dorset, but he looked quite as tall. He was old—eighty! But his hair was only streaked with white, and his body was unshrunk, save for the rising veins showing in his hands and throat. He might have appeared obedient to some legend; his face fitted to the requirements of such a fancy. Here was the bony, crooked nose of the tyrant, the eyes of the dreamer—of one who imagines largely and vastly—and under that face, like an iron plowshare, sat the jaw that carries out the dream. And from the whole body of the man, moving here in the twilight of his life, vitality radiated.

The two, mated thus picturesquely, caught and stimulated the fancy of the crowds of natives thronging the road to Oban. Little chil-

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## *The Gathering*

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dren, holding wisps of purple heather tied with bits of tartan ribbon, ran beside them, and forgot, in their admiration, to offer the bouquets for a sixpence; a dowager duchess, old and important, looked after the pair through the jeweled rims of her lorgnette; she was gouty and stout now, but once upon a time, slim like that girl, she had held a ribbon dancing with the exquisite prince sitting now splendidly above the land, and the picture recalled by this youth, this beauty, was a memory priceless. Once a soldier of some northern regiment saluted, moved by a deference which he gave himself no trouble to define; and once a Fort William piper, touched somewhere in the region of his fancies, struck up one of those haunting airs inspired by the Pretender—

“Speed, bonnie boat, like a bird on the wing.

‘Onward!’ the sailors cry.

Carry the lad that was born to be King

Over the sea to Skye—”

preserving forever in the memory the weird cry of gulls, the long rhythmic wash of the sea, and the loneliness of Scotland.



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## *The Gilded Chair*

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But the impression that seized and dominated the Duke of Dorset was that he knew these two persons. Not as living people—never in his life had he seen either of them as living people. But in some other way, as, for example, pictures out of some nursery story book come to life. And yet, not quite that. The knowledge of them seemed to emerge from that mysterious period of childhood, existing anterior to the running of the human memory. And he tried to recall them as a child tries to recall the language of the birds which he seems once to have understood, or the meaning of the pictures which the frost etches on the window pane—things he had once known, but had somehow forgotten.

The idea was bizarre and fantastic, but it was strangely compelling, and he followed along the road, obsessed by the mood of it.

Presently, as the old man now and then looked about him, his bearing, the contrasts in his face, the strange blend of big dominating qualities, suggested something to the Duke of Dorset which he seemed recently to have known—a relation—an illusive parallel, which, for a time,

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## *The Gathering*

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he was unable definitely to fix. Then, as though the hidden idea stepped abruptly from behind a curtain, he got it.

On certain ruins in Asia, one finds again and again, cut in stone, a figure with a lion body, eagle wings, and a human face—that mysterious symbol formulated by the ancients to represent the authority that dominates the energies of the world.

But it was the other, this girl with the dark eyes, the dark hair, the slender, supple body, that particularly disturbed him. He could not analyze this feeling. But he knew that if he were a child, without knowing why, without trying to know why, he would have gone to her and said, “I am so glad you have come.” And he would have been filled with the wonder of it. So it would have been with him before the years stripped him of that first wisdom; and yet, now at maturity, stripped of it, the impulse and the wonder remained.

The Duke of Dorset continued to walk slowly, at a dozen paces, behind these two persons. He wore the dress usual to a north-country gentle-



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## *The Gilded Chair*

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man—a knickerbocker suit of homespun tweed, with woolen stockings and the low Norwegian shoes, with thin double seam running around the top of the foot. This costume set in relief the man's sinewy figure. Among those contesting in the field, which they were now leaving, there was hardly to be found, in physique, one the equal of this Duke. Thicker shoulders and bigger muscles were to be seen there, but they belonged to men slow and heavy like the Clydesdale draft horse. The height, the symmetry, the even proportions of the Duke of Dorset were not to be equaled. Moreover, the man was lean, compact and hard, like a hunter put by grooms, with unending care, into condition.

This he had got from following the spoor of beasts into the desolation of wood and desert; from the clean air of forests, drawn into lungs sobbing with fatigue; from the sun hardening fiber into iron, leaching out fat, binding muscles with sheathings of copper; from bread, often black and dry; meat roasted over embers, and the crystal water of springs. It was that gain above rubies, with which Nature rewards those

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## *The Gathering*

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walking with her in the waste places of the earth.

Ordinarily, such a person would have claimed the attention of the crowds along the road to Oban, but here, behind this old man and this girl, he was unnoticed.

The day was perfect. From the sea came the thin, weird cry of gulls, from the field behind him, the wail of pipes. Presently the two persons whom he followed stopped to speak with some one in a shop, and he overtook them on the road.

At this moment the Marchesa Soderrelli came through the shop door.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE MENACE

THE Duke of Dorset had gone to tea on the American yacht. It was a thing which he had not intended to do when he came to Oban. The general conception of that nation current on the Continent of Europe had not impressed him with the excellence of its people. The United States of America was thought to be a sort of Spanish Main, full of adventurers, where no one of the old, sure, established laws of civilization ran. A sort of "house of refuge" for the revolutionary middle class of the world—the valet who would be a gentleman, the maid who would be a lady. It was a country of pretenders, posers, actors. Those who came out of it with their vast, incredible fortunes were, after all, only rich shopkeepers. They were clever, unusually clever, but they were masqueraders.

But, somehow, he could not attach either the one or the other of these two persons to this conception of the United States of America.

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## *The Menace*

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He did not stop to consider whether this curious old man, whose face, whose body, whose big, dominant manner recalled in suggestion those stone figures covered with vines forgotten in Asia, was a mere powerful bourgeois, grown rich by some idiosyncrasy of chance, a mere trader taking over with a large hand the avenues of commerce, a mere, big tropical product of a country, in wealth-producing resources itself big and tropical; or one of another order who had drawn this nation of middle class exiles under him, as in romances some hardy marquis had made himself the king of outlaws.

Nor did he stop to consider whether this girl was a new order of woman evolved out of the exquisite blend of some choice alien bloods.

The thing that moved him was the dominion of that mood already on him when the Marchesa Soderrelli came so opportunely through the shop door.

Let us explain that sensation as we like. One of those innumerable hypnotic suggestions of Nature drawing us to her purpose, or a trick of the mind, or some vagrant memory

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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antedating the experiences of life. The answer is to seek. The philosopher of Dantzic was of the first opinion, our universities of the second, and the ancients of the third. One may stand as he pleases in this distinguished company. Certain it is, that, when human reason was in its clearest luster, old, wise men, desperately set on getting at the truth, were of the opinion that some shadowy memories entered with us through the door of life.

Caroline Childers poured the tea and the Duke of Dorset sat with his eyes on her. He seemed to see before him in this girl two qualities which he had not believed it possible to combine: The first delicate sheen of things newly created, as, for instance, the first blossom of the wild brier, that falls to pieces under the human hand, and an experience of life. This young girl, who, at such an age in any drawing-room of Europe, would be merely a white fragment in a corner, was here easily and without concern taking the first place. The little party was, in a sense, a thing of fragments.

Cyrus Childers was talking. The Duke was

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## *The Menace*

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watching the young girl, and replying when he must. The Marchesa Soderrelli sat with her hands idly in her lap and her eyes narrowed, looking out at something in the harbor.

It was an afternoon slipped somehow through the door of heaven. The sea dimpled under a sheet of sun. The bay was covered with every manner of craft, streaming with pennants, yachts from every country of Europe in gala trimmings. It was as though the world had met here for a festival. Crews from rival yacht clubs were rowing. The bay was full of music, laughter, color, if one looked straight out toward Loch Lynne, but, if off toward the open water, following the Marchesa's eyes, he saw on the edge of all this music, these lights, this color, this swimming fête, the gray looming bulk of a warship, with her long, lean steel back, and her dingy turrets, lying low in the sea, as though she had this moment emerged from the blue water—as though she were some deep-sea monster come up unnoticed on the border of this festival.

The Marchesa interrupted the conversation.



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## *The Gilded Chair*

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"Do you know what that reminds me of?" she said, indicating the warship. "It reminds me of the silent *Iroquois* that used always to attend the Puritan May Days."

Cyrus Childers replied in his big voice.

"Are you seeing the yellow peril, Marchesa?" he said.

"I don't like it," she replied. "It seems out of place. Every other nation that we know is here, dancing in its ribbons around the May pole, and there stands the silent *Iroquois* in his war paint."

"Perhaps," said Caroline Childers, "the little brown man came in the only clothes he had."

"I think Miss Childers has it right," said the Duke of Dorset. "I think the brown man came in the only clothes he had, and he has possessed these clothes only for a fortnight."

"Is it a new cruiser, then?" said Mr. Childers.

"It was built on the Clyde for Chile, I think," replied the Duke, "and the Japanese Government bought it on the day it was launched."

"How like the Oriental," said the Marchesa,



“to keep the purchase a secret until the very day the warship went into the sea. Other nations build their ships in the open; this one in the dark. She pretends to be poor; she shows us her threadbare coat; she takes our ministers to look into her empty treasury, but she buys a warship. How true it is that the Anglo-Saxon never knows what is in the ‘back’ of the oriental mind.”

“Perhaps,” said Caroline Childers, “we are quite as puzzling to the Oriental.”

“That is the very point of it,” replied the Marchesa. “They do not understand each other and they never will. They are oil and water; they will not mix. They can only be friends in make-believe, and therefore they must be enemies in reality. Why do we deceive ourselves? In the end the world must be either white, or it must be yellow.”

“Such a conclusion,” said the Duke of Dorset, “seems to me to be quite wrong. Certain portions of the earth are adapted to certain races. Why should not these races retain them, and when they have approached a standard of civil-

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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ization, why should they not be admitted into the confederacy of nations?"

"I do not know a doctrine," replied the Marchesa, "more remote from the colonial policy of England."

"Do you always quite understand England?" said the Duke. "Here, for instance, is a new and enlightened nation, arising in the East. We do not set ourselves to beat it down and possess its islands. We welcome it; we open the door to it."

"And it will enter and possess the house," said the Marchesa. "What the white man is now doing with his hand open, he must, later on, undo with his hand closed. Look already how arrogant this oriental nation has become since she has got England at her back. It was a master play, this alliance. The white man had all but possessed the world when this wily Oriental slipped in and divided the two great English-speaking people. He was not misled by any such sophistry as a brotherhood of nations. He knew that one or the other of the two races must dominate, must exterminate the

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## *The Menace*

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other. He could not attack the white man's camp unless he could first divide it. Now, he has got it divided, and he is getting ready to attack. Can one doubt the menace to the United States?"

Cyrus Childers laughed. "Oh," he said, "the United States is in no danger. Japan is not going to try a war with us. It is all oriental bravado."

"But he is creeping in on the Pacific Coast already," said the Marchesa. "He is getting a footing; he is establishing a base; he is planting a colony to rise when he requires it; so that when he makes his great move to thrust the white man's frontier from the coast back into the desert, there will already be Japanese colonies planted on the soil. You have, yourself, told me that they are always arriving and spreading themselves imperceptibly along the coast."

"My dear Marchesa," said Mr. Childers, "the little Japanese is only looking for employment. He has none of your big designs. His instincts are all those of the servant." He looked at the

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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Duke of Dorset. "If Japan," he continued, "wishes to extend her territory, she will wish to extend it in that part of the world which the Oriental now inhabits. If there is really any menace, my dear Marchesa, it is a menace to England, and not to us. If Japan had a great design to dominate the world, would she not undertake to weld all the oriental races into a nation of which she would be the head? Would she not go about it as Bismarck went about the creation of Germany? That, it seems to me, would be the only feasible plan for such an enterprise."

"And do you think for a moment," said the Marchesa, "that she has not this very plan?"

"I do not believe that Japan has any such plan," replied the Duke of Dorset.

"And you," said the Marchesa, "who have lived in the East, who have assisted England to make this alliance, do you, who know the Oriental, believe that he does not dream of overrunning the world?"

"Dream!" replied the Duke of Dorset. "Perhaps he dreams. I was speaking of a

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## *The Menace*

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plan, and a plan means a policy that one may carry out. Japan cannot move in India because there is England in India."

"Not yet," said the Marchesa, "but when she shall have made the white men enemies; when she shall have grown stronger under English friendship. She cannot yet depend on these oriental states. They are still afraid of the white man. She has encouraged them by her victory over Russia, but not enough. She must give them another proof that the yellow race is not the inferior of the white one. If she can crush the white man in North America, the yellow man will rise in Asia. Then the dream becomes a plan; then the plan becomes a reality."

"My dear Marchesa," said Caroline, "you must not so berate the little yellow brother in the house of his friends."

"Different races are never friends," replied the Marchesa. "I know because I am a woman, and have lived among them. The Latin does not like the Teuton, nor either of them the Saxon, and yet, all these are of the Caucasian race."



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## *The Gilded Chair*

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Add to this the inherent physical repugnance which exists between the colored races and the white, and this natural dislike becomes a racial hatred. It is no mere question of inclination; it is an organic antipathy running in the blood. Ministers who draw treaties may not know this, but every woman knows it."

"Then," said Caroline, "there can be no danger to us in England's treaty with Japan."

"And why is there no danger?" said the Marchesa.

"Dear me," said the girl, "if I could only remember how Socrates managed arguments." She took a pose of mock gravity. "I think he would begin like this:

"You hold, Marchesa, that the hatred of one race for another increases with the difference between them?"

"I do," replied the Marchesa.

"Then, Marchesa, you ought also to hold that the love between nations increases as that difference disappears."

"I do hold that, too, Socrates," said the Marchesa.



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## *The Menace*

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“Also, Marchesa, it is your opinion that of all races the oriental is least like us?”

“It is.”

“And of all races, the Briton is most like us?”

“Yes.”

“Then the Jap ought to hate us with all his heart?”

“He ought, Socrates,” said the Marchesa.

“And,” continued the girl, making a little courtesy to the Duke of Dorset, “the Briton ought to love us with all his heart?”

The Marchesa laughed. “I leave the Duke of Dorset to answer for his people.”

The Duke put down his cup. “With all our heart,” he said.

But the Marchesa was not to be diverted. “I think,” she said, “you are sounding deeper waters than you suspect. We know how General Ian Hamilton said he felt when he saw the first white prisoners taken by the Japanese in Manchuria; and we know that Canada has had the same trouble on her Pacific Coast as the United States. This family feeling of the white

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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man for the white man may prove stronger than any state policy." She turned to the Duke of Dorset. "The riots in Vancouver," she said, "are the flying straws."

"Both nations," said the Duke of Dorset, "ought firmly to suppress these outbreaks. Vancouver ought no more to be permitted to jeopardize the policy of England than California or Oregon ought to be permitted to involve the foreign policy of the United States. I am going out to Canada to look a little into this question for myself."

"And you will find," said the Marchesa, "what any woman could tell you, that these outbursts are only the manifestations of a deep-seated racial antipathy; an instinctive resistance of all the English-speaking people alike to having the frontier of the white man's dominion thrust back by the Asiatic."

Caroline Childers interrupted. "You are a hopeless Jingo, my dear Marchesa," she said. "Let us go and see the regattas."

## CHAPTER VII

### THE COUNSEL OF WISDOM

THE Marchesa Soderrelli and Cyrus Childers remained on the yacht. When the small boat came alongside the Duke asked to be allowed to take the oars, and so the two had gone alone to see the regattas.

The bay was full of crafts. The crews of rival yachts crowded along the course. Small boats were packed together in an almost unbroken line; one coming late could find no place.

Everywhere awnings, flags, gay parasols shut out the view of the regattas. The Duke pulled out into the bay and north toward Loch Lynne. He was rather glad of the pressing crowd. This young girl held his interest; the enigma of her puzzled him; she was like no other woman. Somehow this dark-eyed, dark-haired girl seemed to present to him the alluring aspect of something newly come into the world; something which he himself had found.

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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There seemed to lie about her, like a vague perfume, something of the compelling lure of fairy women, called up by the fancy; of women dreamed of; of women created by the mind to satisfy every hunger of the senses. The Duke of Dorset could not regard this girl without this vague illusion entering his body like the first faint subtle odors of a garden. The illusion seemed constantly to attend her. The presence of others, commonplace surroundings, did not remove it. Her conversation, no matter how it ran, did not remove it. He seemed unable by any act of his will to dispel it.

There seemed, somehow, from the first moment, a certain intimate relation existing between himself and this girl whom he had found; as though she had appeared, obedient to some call issuing unconsciously from the mysterious instincts of his nature. The sense of it had entered the man at once when he came before her, as the subtle, compelling influence of some pictures enter and seize our attention when we approach them. And he had wished to stop and receive it. He had gone about under the

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## *The Counsel of Wisdom*

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vague spell of it. When he had been shown over the yacht, he had felt a certain difficulty in giving the attention to the details of that exquisite craft which a proper courtesy required. Afterwards on the deck he had hardly followed the conversation. He had wished to be left alone, to be undisturbed, as one wishes to be undisturbed before the picture that moves him.

He pulled the little boat out into the sea. He drew beyond the yachts, beyond the warship, off the great rock that rises out of the green water north of the bay. He wished to be alone with this girl. He wished to inquire of her, as one would inquire of a fairy woman found in some sunlit hollow; to ask her intimate and personal questions. Without being conscious of it, his conversation entered this avenue of inquiry. He seized upon the Marchesa Soderrelli as one who might lead the way.

“I wonder,” he said, “why it is that the Marchesa Soderrelli bears so great a distrust of the Oriental?”

“Perhaps from her experiences of life,” replied the girl.

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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“Is she an old friend, then?” said the Duke.

“I have known her only for a month at Biarritz. But long ago, when she was a little girl, my uncle knew her. She was born in a southern city of the United States. She was very beautiful, my uncle says. I think he must have been in love with her then, but he was a man of middle life, and she was a mere girl. I think he loved her because he always talks of her when one discusses women with him, and he never married. I only know the shadow of the story. Her family wished her to make an amazing marriage. My uncle was then only on his way up, so her family married her to an Italian Marquis in the diplomatic service. I think he was in some way near the reigning house, and if certain possible things were to happen, he would go very high. The things never happened, and I think the indolent Marquis merely dragged her about the world. But you ought to know her better than I.”

“I have occasionally seen her,” replied the Duke. “Her husband was always somewhere



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## *The Counsel of Wisdom*

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in the diplomatic service, usually in the East. He was rarely anywhere for long. But I judge the position of his family always found a place for him."

"Was he a very bad man, this Marquis?"

The Duke did not make a direct reply. He would have wished to evade this question, but there seemed no way.

"He was a person one usually avoided," he said.

"One begins to understand," continued the girl, "why the Marchesa spoke just now with so much heat. She has always met with these other races. She has been behind the scenes with them. In the South, where she was born, there was always the negro; and moving about the East, there was always the Oriental, and, besides this, her husband was of another race, not so widely different from ourselves as these, but still distinct from us. She had a look in at the door."

"But we cannot take the Marchesa for a prophet."

"Why not? She is a woman."

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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“And how may a woman be better able to divine events?”

“She feels.”

“Do not men also feel?”

“But feeling is the way a woman gets at the truth. Men go by another road.”

“But is not the other road a safer one?”

The girl laughed. “The English think it is. We are not so certain. I see you trudge along it, and I know that you are safe—ever so safe—but, are you happy?”

She put out her hands toward the land. “You have made everything in this great, solid island safe. Even one’s marriage is a thing to be managed by the chief justice. Do you think one ought to go to the altar by this other road?”

“But why should one follow one’s reason in every other thing and abandon it in this?”

The girl’s face became thoughtful.

“I do not know,” she said. “I wish I did.” She trailed her fingers in the water. “Perhaps it is a choice between being safe and being happy. Perhaps, after all, older persons know best. Do you think they do?”

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## *The Counsel of Wisdom*

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The Duke of Dorset was interested in the woman rather than these speeches. The conversation was after a certain manner a thing apart. He did not attach it to this exquisite girl. It seemed rather a portion of some elaborate rite by which she was made to appear, to be, to remain. He continued it as one new at magic continues his formula, in order to hold in the world the vision he has called up. But the formula was not of the essence of this vision. It was words following after a certain fashion. He did not, then, go within for his replies, but without, to the custom of his country, to the established belief rather than his own. It was a moving of the man's mind along the lines of least resistance; as though the magician made up his formula from anything that he remembered, while the deeps of consciousness in him were enjoying the appearance that he held by it.

“Older persons,” he said, “are possessed of a greater experience of life. They have gone a journey that youth is setting out on. They ought to know.”

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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“How to be safe? Yes, I believe that,” she replied. “I believe they know that. But how to be happy? I am not so certain. We have instincts that we feel are superior to any reason, instincts that seem to warn us—I mean a woman has. She has a sort of sense of happiness. I cannot make it plain. It is like the sense of direction that leads an animal home through an unfamiliar country. Put it down in a place it does not know, and it will presently set out in the right direction. We are like that. We feel that right direction. Older persons may insist that we take another path, but we feel it wrong. We feel that our happiness does not lie that way. Ought we to go against that instinct?”

The charm of the girl deepened as she spoke. She became more vital, more serious, more moved. And the attention of the man drew nearer to her and farther from what he said. He began to repeat arguments that he had heard when families had gone about the making of a marriage.

It was too important a matter to be governed by a whim, an inclination, a personal attach-

ment. It was a great complex undertaking. Obligations lapped over into it from both the past and the future. The rights of one's people touched it. All the practical affairs of life touched it. The standards of one's ancestors must not be lowered. The thing was a human chain; every man must put in his link. The obligation on him was to make that link as good as his fathers had made it. He must not debase the metal, he must not alloy it. This was the great moving duty; against this no personal inclination ought to stand. Moreover, who would leave the sale of an estate or the investing of revenues to one having no experience of life; and yet, the making of a marriage was more important than the sale of any estate, or the placing of any revenues. It was the administration for life of a great trust in perpetuity.

The man was merely reciting. He was like that one playing at magic, merely feeding words into his formula one after another, as he could find them, because thereby the appearance that he was drawing out of the shadow was becoming more distinct.

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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The girl, leaning forward, was following every word with the greatest interest; her eyes wide, her lips parted. She was like some kelpie woman presented with the gift of life, inquiring of its conditions.

“You make me feel how great you English are,” she said, “how big, and sane, and practical. No wonder you go about setting the world in order; but where does the poor little individual come in?”

“The house is greater than any member of it,” replied the Duke.

“I see that,” she said. “I see the big purpose. But must one give up all one’s little chance of happiness? Suppose one’s feelings were against the judgment of one’s family?”

“We must believe,” he said, “that many persons are wiser than one.”

“But does one’s instinct, one’s personal inclination never count?”

“It often counts,” he said. “It often wrecks in a generation all that one’s people have done.”

“You make me afraid,” said the girl. “Suppose in your big, sane island a woman felt that



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## *The Counsel of Wisdom*

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she ought not to do as her people told her. Suppose she felt it to be wrong. I do not mean that she loved some other man, because if she did, I think she could not be made to obey. But suppose she loved no one; suppose she only felt that this was not the thing to do. Ought she to give up that poor little instinct?"

The Duke of Dorset recited the stock answer to that query: Suppose a prince, called to rule for life a hereditary kingdom, were about to select a minister, would he go into the street and pick a man by instinct, or would he hear his parliament?

The girl made a helpless gesture.

"You convince me," she said, "and yet, one would like to believe that one's instinct can be trusted, that it is somehow above everything else, eternally right. One would like to believe that some little romance remained in the world; that some place, somewhere, the one, the real one, would find us if we only waited—if we only trusted to this feeling—if we only held fast to it in a sort of blind, persisting faith. But I suppose older people know."

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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The sun, slanting eastward, rippled on the sea. The boat lifted and fell. The Duke pulled back to the yacht. Swarms of boats were detaching themselves from the packed lines of the regattas. He took a sweep out in the bay to escape this moving hive. A furrow of shining water followed the boat. It widened and spread into a gilded track leading out into the sea.

The girl no longer spoke. The atmosphere, as of something vague, unreal, deepened around her. Again to the man there returned the impulse to know things intimate and personal about this woman whom he had found. Was she alone in the world with this curious old man? Had she no one nearer than this uncle? He remembered in one of the salons of the yacht, on the old man's table, a photograph in a big silver frame—the picture of a young man. He remembered the vivid impression that this picture had given him, an impression of a certain aggressive alertness that struck him as almost insolent—as though the person bearing this face were accustomed to thrust along toward what he wanted. He began to compare the face with the

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## *The Counsel of Wisdom*

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girl before him. There ought to be some feature, some mark of blood, some trick of expression common to the two of them, but he could not find it. His mind was laboring with it when they reached the yacht, and the old man came down the gangway to receive them.

The young girl stepped out of the boat. Her gay, sunny air returned.

"I have been taking a lesson in obedience, Uncle," she said. "The Duke of Dorset has made me see how wise older people are, and how we ought to follow the plan of life they make for us, and how we ought not to set our whims against their reason."

A smile flitted over the old man's face like sunlight over gun metal.

"I am very much obliged to the Duke of Dorset," he said.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE WOMAN ON THE WALL

CAROLINE was dressing. The Marchesa sat with her elbows on the Buhl table; her chin in her palm; her eyes following the young girl, being prepared, under the maid's hands, for the Oban ballroom. Evening had descended. The curtains were drawn. The salon was softly lighted. The Marchesa was seeking for the girl's impression of the Duke of Dorset.

"You are disappointed, then," said the Marchesa.

The girl laughed, her soft voice rippling like a brook.

"He is so unlike, so wholly unlike, everything I fancied him to be."

"And what did you fancy him?" said the Marchesa.

The girl sprang up, swept the long hair back from her face and took a pose before the table.

“Like this,” she said, “with big, dreamy eyes, a sad mouth, long delicate hands, and lots of lace on his coat.”

The naïve, mischievous, jesting air of the girl was adorable; but more adorable was that slender figure, posing for the Marchesa Soderrelli in the dishabille of her toilet with its white stuffs and lace. Her slender, beautiful body was not unlike that of some perfect, immortal youth, transported from sacred groves; some exquisite Adonis coming from a classic myth; except for certain delicate contours that marked a woman emerging from these slender outlines. Even to the Marchesa, seated with her chin in her hands, there was, over the beautiful body of the girl, a charm that thrilled her; the charm of something soft and white and warm and caressing.

“But he isn’t the least like this, Marchesa,” she ran on. “Don’t you remember what everybody said of him at Biarritz—a sort of Prince Charlie? And here he is, so big, and brown, and strong that I simply cannot fix a single fancy to him.”

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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Her eyes danced and her voice laughed.

“He hasn’t a sad mouth at all. He has a big, firm mouth, and there isn’t the wisp of a shadow in his eyes. They are steady, like this—and level, like this—and he looks at you—so.”

She narrowed her eyelids, lifted her chin, and reproduced that profound, detached expression with which the Duke of Dorset had continued to regard her on this afternoon.

“Why, I have been simply fluttering all day. He has stalked through all my little illusions of him and swept them away like cobwebs. There isn’t a delicate, pale, ‘bonnie Charlie’ thing about him. He is a big, hard, ivory creature, colored with walnut stain. He looks like he could break horseshoes and things. He drove that little boat through the sea with a mere shrug of his elbows. If Prince Charlie had been like that the capitol of England would be now in Edinburgh. I wish you could have seen him out there in the bay.”

The Marchesa had not removed her eyes from the girl.



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## *The Woman on the Wall*

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"I wish rather," she said, "that he could see you now."

"Oh, Marchesa!" cried the girl, fleeing back to her chair and the protection of her dressing gown. She huddled in it and drew it about her. She looked around at the door, at the window, she caught her breath. "How you frightened me!" she said.

"Forgive me, my dear child," said the Marchesa. "I did not mean to speak that way. I meant only to regret that the Duke of Dorset can never know how wonderful you are."

"Perhaps he doesn't care a fig how wonderful I am," said the girl, now safely hidden in the exquisite silk gown.

The Marchesa did not reply. Instead she asked a question. "Tell me what he said."

"Oh, Marchesa, I led him into terribly deep water. I made him tell me how an English marriage is gone about. Dear me, what a fuss they make over it, and what a solemn, ponderous, life-and-death thing it becomes when the sturdy Briton gets at it."

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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She put out her hands with an immense gravity.

“‘It is the administration for life of a great trust in perpetuity.’”

She rolled the words with a delicious intonation. “All the wiseacres in the family eat and smoke over it. They hold councils on it. They trudge around it, and they discuss it with a lawyer, just as one would do if one were making his will. They brush every little vestige of romance out of it. They make it safe.”

For a moment her face became serious. “I wonder if they are right. I wonder if older persons know.”

Then she clasped her hands with a burst of laughter. “Why, if I were English, I would be expected to huddle up against my Uncle’s coat and say, ‘Far be it from me to doubt the wisdom of your opinion, dear Uncle.’ And I would be handed over, boots and baggage, to the fine young man in the silver frame on my Uncle’s table.” Again for a moment the laughter vanished and the grave air returned. “I wish I knew what the poor little

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## *The Woman on the Wall*

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mite of a girl thought about it. I wish I knew if in the end she was glad to have her life made so safe. I wish you could have heard all the excellent reasons the Duke of Dorset repeated. He made me afraid."

"I would rather have seen the Duke," said the Marchesa.

"You mean how he looked when he was talking?"

"Exactly that," replied the Marchesa.

"Well, he looked like a man who is thinking one thing and saying something else. He looked like this." And again she contracted her eyelids, and lifted her chin.

"Ah!" said the Marchesa.

The girl jerked her head, scattering the pins which the maid was putting into her hair.

"Why did you say 'Ah' like that?"

"Because," replied the Marchesa, "it helps to confirm a theory I have got."

"About the Duke's mind being far away?"

"Far away from what he has been saying all this afternoon," replied the Marchesa, "but not far away."

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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"But that is not a theory. A theory would explain this phenomenon."

"I know. It is only an evidence upon which I base my theory."

"And what is the theory?"

"That the Duke of Dorset has found something."

"How interesting! What has he found?"

"A thing he has been looking for."

"Something he had lost?"

"No, nothing that he had lost."

"But how could he have found something that he was looking for if he had not lost it?"

"He did not know that he was looking for it."

The girl began to laugh.

" 'Through a stone,  
Through a reel,  
Through a spinning wheel—'

What is it that the Duke of Dorset found that he did not lose, while he was looking for it and did not know it? I can't answer that riddle."

"Unfortunately," said the Marchesa, "you are the only one who ever can answer it."

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## *The Woman on the Wall*

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“Wise woman,” said the girl, “you speak in parables.”

“I am going to speak in a parable now,” replied the Marchesa. “Listen. One day a woman on her way to the city of Dreams arrived before the city of the Awakened, which is also called the city of Zeus, and there came out to her the people of that city, and they said, ‘Enter and dwell with us, for there is no city of Dreams, and you go on a fool’s errand.’ And one persuaded her, and she entered with him, and when the gates were closed, they took her and bound her, and cut out her tongue, for they said among themselves, ‘She will perceive that we are liars, and she will call down from the house top to others whom we go out to seek. Moreover, if she be maimed, she cannot escape from us and flee away to the city of Dreams, for one may in no wise enter that city who hath a blemish.’ And they put burdens upon her and she went about that city of wrath and labor and bitterness, dumb. And years fled. And on a certain day, when she was old, as she walked on the wall in the cool of the evening, she saw an-

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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other drawing near to the city of the Awakened, which is also called the city of Zeus. And the other was young and fair as she had been when she set out to go to the city of Dreams. And while she looked, the people of the city went out to this traveler to beguile her and to persuade her. And the woman walking on the wall would have called down to warn her, but she could not, for she was dumb."

The girl leaned forward in her chair. Her voice was low and soft.

"Dear Marchesa," she said, "what do you mean?"

The Marchesa Soderrelli looked down at the table. She put up her hand and flicked away particles of invisible dust.

"I do not mean anything," she answered. "I am merely a foolish old woman."

But the girl went on speaking low and softly.

"Do you mean that we ought not to believe what older persons say? That one ought to follow what one feels? That all the excellent reasons which the Duke of Dorset repeated are to persuade us to accept the commonplace—to



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## *The Woman on the Wall*

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be contented with the reality, to abandon our hopes, our aspirations, our dreams? Do you mean to show me how it fares with the poor little mite of a girl, when she is persuaded that happiness is an illusion, and is made to give up the dream of it? How it would have gone with little Cinderella if she had been persuaded to believe there was no fairy godmother, and no prince coming to make her queen. And how, if she had believed it and married the chimney sweep she would have missed it all?" Her voice sank. "My dear Marchesa, is this the warning of the woman on the wall?"

"You forget the parable," replied the Marchesa. "The woman on the wall was dumb."

The girl arose, went over to the Marchesa and put her hand on her shoulder.

"If I had been that other traveler," she said, "I would have gone into the city of Zeus, I would have found the woman who was dumb, and I would have taken her with me to the city of Dreams."

"My dear," replied the Marchesa, "you will not remember the story. That other woman

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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could never enter the blessed city; she was maimed."

"Then, Marchesa," said the girl, "do you think the traveler should have gone on alone?"

The Marchesa took both of the girl's hands, and looked up into her face.

"I will tell you something else," she said. "In the city of the Awakened, there was a maker of images, old and wise; and sometimes the woman went into his shop, and because she was dumb she wrote in the dust on the floor, with her finger, and she asked him about the city of Dreams, and how one reached it. And he said: 'Not the travelers only who pass by the city of Zeus win their way to the city of Dreams; our fathers have gone there also, but not often, and very long ago, and the direction and the distance and the landmarks of the way our fathers have forgot, but this thing our fathers have remembered, that no man ever found his way to the city of Dreams who set out on that quest alone.'"

"But if one could not go alone, how could one go at all?"

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## *The Woman on the Wall*

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“He said there was always another chosen to go with us.”

“And where is the other?”

“He said, ‘In the world somewhere.’”

“And must one seek him?”

“He said that one was always seeking him, from the day that one was born, only one knew it not.”

“And what is there to lead us, did he say that?”

“The woman asked him that,” replied the Marchesa, “and he said: ‘What is there to lead the little people of the sea when they travel with the tides?’”

Caroline stooped over and put her arm close around the Marchesa Soderrelli.

“No matter,” she said, “I would stay with the poor dumb woman.”

The Marchesa arose. She lifted the girl’s chin and kissed her.

“No, dear,” she said, “you must go on to the city of Dreams.”

## CHAPTER IX

### THE USURPER

THE Marchesa went up to the deck of the yacht. She had dressed early and there was yet an hour to wait. A deep topaz twilight lay on the world. There was no darkness. It was as though all the light remained, but it came now through a colored window. At the door she stopped. Out beyond her Cyrus Childers was walking backward and forward along the deck. His step was quick and elastic; his back straight. Age sat lightly on him. She watched him for a moment, and then she went over to him.

“Ah, Marchesa,” he said, in his big voice; “what do you think of this night?”

The Marchesa looked out at the bay flooded with its soft topaz color.

“It is wonderful,” she said. “It makes me believe that somehow, somewhere, our dreams shall come true by the will of God.”

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## *The Usurper*

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The old man's jaw tightened on his answer.

"Who makes the will of God?"

"It is the great moving impulse at the heart of things," said the Marchesa.

"Nonsense," said the old man. "One makes the will of God for himself. The moving impulse is here," and he struck his chest with his clenched hand. "What we dream comes true if we make it come true. But it does not if we sit on our doorstep or shut ourselves up to await a visitation."

He made a great sweeping gesture. "How can these elements that are dead and an appearance resist the human mind that is alive and real?"

"But providence," said the Marchesa, "chance, luck, fortune, circumstance, do these words mean nothing?"

The old man laughed.

"Marchesa," he said, "if a man had a double equipment of skull space he could sweep these words out of the language."

"Then you do not believe they stand for anything?"

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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“They stand for ignorance.”

“We are taught from the cradle,” continued the Marchesa, “that there is in the universe a guiding destiny that moves the lives of each one of us to a certain fortune.”

“It is the wildest fancy,” replied the old man, “that the human mind ever got hold of. The fact is, that man has hardly ceased to be an animal, that he has just discovered his intelligence, and that the great majority of the race have no more skill of it than an infant of its hands. Anyone with a modicum of foresight can do anything he likes. If a visitor from an older and more luminous planet were to observe how whole nations of men are made to do precisely what a few slightly superior persons wish, he would never cease to laugh. And all the time these nations of men think they are doing what they please. They think they are directing their own destinies. They think they are free.”

The Marchesa came a little closer to him. “Have you made your destiny what you wish it to be?” she said.

He raised his arms and spread out his fingers



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## *The Usurper*

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with a curious hovering gesture. Then he answered.

“Yes,” he said, “at last.”

“Have you made every dream that you have dreamed come true?”

“Every dream,” he said, “but one, and it is coming true.”

“How do you know that?” she said.

“Because,” he said, “I have the instinct of conquest. Don’t you remember what I told you when you were a little girl?”

“I remember,” replied the Marchesa slowly, “but I was very young and I did not understand.”

“I was past fifty then,” said the man. He put out his arms with his hovering gesture. “I am eighty now, but I have done it all.”

The purple light fell on his jaw like a plow-share, on his bony nose, on his hard gray eyes, bringing them into relief against the lines and furrows of his face.

“I have drawn the resources of a nation under me; I have got it in my hand; it obeys me”; he laughed, “but I respect its illusions;

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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I do not offend its eye. I do not wear gewgaws and tinsel and I have hidden my Versailles in a forest. Nations see no farther than the form of things. A republic is as easy to govern as an empire if one only keeps his gilded chair in the garret."

"And, tell me, have you gotten any pleasure out of life?"

The old man made a contemptuous gesture.

"Pleasure," he said, "is the happiness of little men; big men are after something more than that. They are after the satisfaction that comes from directing events. This is the only happiness; to refuse to recognize any directing power in the universe but oneself; to crush out every other authority; to be the one dominating authority; to make events take the avenue one likes. That is the happiness of the god of the universe, if there is any god of the universe. For my part I recognize no authority higher than myself."

He moved about the deck, his arms out, his fingers extended, his face lifted.

"I am willing for men to go about with their

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## *The Usurper*

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string of playthings and to imagine they are getting pleasure out of life; but for my part, if I could be the master behind the moving of events, I would not be content to sit like a village idiot and watch a spinning top. I am willing for little men, lacking courage, to endure life as they find it, and to say it is the will of God; but as for me I will not be cowed into submission. I will not be held back from laying hold of the lever of the great engine merely because the rumble of the machinery fills other men with terror. The fearful may obey all the vague deities they like, but as for me, I wear no god's collar."

"Then," said the Marchesa, "you do not believe that we have any immortal destiny?"

The old man raised his arms with that sudden swift upward sweep of a vulture, seeking to rise from the ground.

"I am not concerned with vague imaginings," he replied. "I do not know whether man is a spirit or a fungus. I only know that the human will is the one power in the universe, so far as we can find out, that

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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is able to direct the moving of events. Nothing else that exists can make the most trivial thing happen or cease to happen. No imagined god or demon, in all the history of the race has ever influenced the order of events as much as the feeblest human creature in an hour of life. Is it not, then, the height of folly for the human mind, that exists and is potent, to yield the direction of events to gods, that are fabled and powerless? ”

His arms were extended and he moved them with a powerful threshing motion, like that vulture, now arisen, beating the air with its wings.

“ The last clutch of the animal clinging to the intelligence of man, as it emerges from the instinct of the beast, is fear. The first man thought the monsters about him were gods. Our fathers thought the elements were gods. We think that the impulse moving the machinery of the world is the will of some divine authority. And always the only thing in the universe that was superior to these things has been afraid to assert itself. The human mind that can change things, that can do as it likes,

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## *The Usurper*

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has been afraid of phantasms that never yet met with anything that they could turn aside."

The old man clenched his hands, contracted his elbows, and brought them down with an abrupt decisive gesture.

"I do not understand," he said, "but I am not afraid. I will not be beaten into submission by vague inherited terrors. I will not be subservient to things that have a lesser power than I have. I will not yield the control of events to elements that are dead, to laws that are unthinking, or to an influence that cannot change. Not all the gods that man has ever worshiped can make things happen to-morrow, but I can make them happen. Therefore, I am a god above them. And how shall a god that is greater than these gods give over the dominion of events into their hands?"

He dropped his arms and with them his big dominant manner. He came over to the rail of the yacht and leaned against it beside the Marchesa Soderrelli.

"Marchesa," he said, "this is the only thing that I know better than other men. It is the only



advantage I have. It is the one thing that I know which they do not seem to know. I have made good use of it. What they have called unforeseen, I have tried to foresee. What they have left to chance, I have tried to direct. And while they have been afraid of the great engine and huddled before it, worshiping the steam, the fire, the grinding of the wheels, imagining that some god sat within at the levers, I have entered and, finding the place empty, have taken hold of the levers for myself."

A certain vague fear possessed the Marchesa Soderrelli. The presumption of this old man seemed to invite some awful judgment of God. Would He permit this open, flaunting treason, this defiant swaggering *lèse majesté*? Surely He permitted it to flourish thus for a season that He might all the more ruthlessly destroy it. The wan, eerie light lying on the world, shadowing about this strange, defiant old man, seemed in itself a sinister premonition. She felt afraid without knowing why, afraid lest she be included in this impending visitation of God's wrath.



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## *The Usurper*

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The old man, leaning against the rail, continued speaking softly: "Do you think that I will get the other thing that I want?"

The Marchesa turned away her face and looked down into the sea to avoid the man's direct dominating manner.

"I do not know," she murmured.

Already she was beginning to waver. She had come ashore from what she considered the wreckage of her life. She had formed then at Biarritz a resolution and a decided plan. She would take what this old man had to offer, that would give her unlimited money. She would bring together this new Duke of Dorset and this girl, and if that alliance could be made, she would have through it, then, a position commensurate to the wealth behind her. She had begun with courage to carry out this plan. She had gone to Doune with a double object, to borrow money to pay debts she must be rid of, and to bring about a meeting between the Duke of Dorset and Caroline Childers. And these two things she had accomplished. Until now the heart in her had been hardened. Until now she

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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had been cold, calculating and determined. Now, somehow, under this mood, a doubt oppressed her.

The sudden, big, dominating laugh of the old man beside her aroused her like a blow.

“I know,” he said, “we are all of us alike. Once past the blossom of youth, we, all of us, men and women alike, are after the same thing. Until then we pursue illusions, will-o’-the-wisps, shining destinies that do not, and cannot arrive; but when we have hardened into life we understand that power is the only source of happiness. We desire to rule, to dominate, to control. We wish to lay hold of the baton of authority; and, look, I have it ready to your hand. I have everything that the Fourteenth Louis had at Versailles, except the name, and what woman past the foolish springtime of life would deny herself such authority as that?”

The Marchesa drew herself up. The muscles in her body stiffened. Her fingers tightened on the rail. With a stroke he had laid her ulterior motives open to the bone. He had

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## *The Usurper*

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made plain what she was endeavoring to conceal, and the bald frankness shocked her. He had stripped the thing naked and it shamed her. But there it was, though naked, the greatest shining lure in the world. Wealth past any European conception, outside the revenues of a state, with the power that attended it. And how poor she was! She had been forced to borrow five hundred pounds to pay tradesmen at her heels. She had sent the money back this very morning in order to loosen their fingers on her skirts that she might go forward to this last adventure. What had she out of all the promise of her life? What had she got ashore with from her sinking galleon but her naked body? How could she, stripped, bruised, empty handed, stand out against the offer of a kingdom?

For a little while the old man watched the tense figure of the woman, then he added: "Do you think that I did not know how your life was running? That I was overlooking this thing while I was getting the other things that I was wanting? Do you think I came to Biar-

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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ritz, over the sea, here, merely to please Caroline? Look, how I came within the very hour—on the tick of the clock!”

Again the Marchesa Soderrelli was astonished. She had believed herself like one who sat in darkness, on the deck of a ship that drifted, and now, as by the flash of a lantern, she saw another toiling at the helm. She had believed this meeting at Biarritz to be the work of fate, chance, fortune, and instead it was the hand of this old man, moving what he called the levers of the great engine. The fear of him deepened.

“Look, Marchesa,” he was saying, “I do not ask you to decide. Come first and see the garden that I have made in a wilderness—the Versailles that I have concealed in a forest.”

He began once more to move, to extend his arms, to spread his hands.

“Remember, Marchesa, you decide nothing; you only say ‘I will come,’ and when you say that, I will prove on the instant that my coming here was for no whim of Caroline, for within

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## *The Usurper*

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the hour, day or night, that you say it, this yacht will go to sea."

The Marchesa, disturbed, caught at the name and repeated it. "But what of Caroline?" she said.

She pronounced the question without regarding the answer to it. Perhaps it was because the old man did not reply directly and to the point. Perhaps because another and more obtruding idea occupied her mind. At any rate his words did not remain in her memory. From what he said, out of the labyrinth of his indirections, the man's plan emerged—the plan of Tiberius withdrawing to Capri, but holding to the empire through the hand of another, a creature to be bound to him with the white body of this girl.

The Marchesa Soderrelli, amazed, began to stammer. "But Caroline," she said, "suppose, suppose, she does not will to obey you?"

The old man laughed. Again, by a tightening of the muscles, his plowshare jaw protruded.

"A child's will," he said; "it is nothing."

## CHAPTER X

### THE RED BENCH

THERE is a raised bench of two broad steps, covered with red cloth, running, like a great circular daïs, around the curious old ballroom of the Oban Gathering. The effect of it is strikingly to enthrone the matron and the dowager, who hold that bench from eleven until five o'clock in the morning. Impressive, important women, gowned in rich stuffs, and of varying ages, from that one coming in beauty to the meridian of life, to that one arriving in wisdom at its close.

The very word bench, applied to this raised seat, is apt and suggestive. The significance of the term presents itself in a sense large and catholic. The judges of the King's Bench do not deal in any greater measure with the problems of human destinies than do the judges of this one. That dowager, old and wise, her chin resting on her hand, her eyes following some



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## *The Red Bench*

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youth whirling a débutante down the long ball-room, weighing carefully his lineage, his income, his social station, will presently deliver an opinion affecting, more desperately, life and lives than any legal one pronounced by my lord upon his woolsack. Here on this bench, while music clashes and winged feet dance, are destinies made and unmade by women who have sounded life and got its measure; who are misled by no illusions; who know accurately into what grim realities the path of every mortal presently descends. There is no tribunal on this earth surpassing in varied and practical knowledge of life these judges of the Red Bench.

This ball is the chiefest function of the Oban Gathering. Here one finds the dazzling splendor which this northern durbar in every other feature strikingly lacks; gowns of Redfern, Worth, Monsieur Paquin; the picturesque uniform of Highland regiments. Every Scottish chief in the dress tartan of his clan, with his sporran, his bright buckles, his kilt; with his stockings turned down over the calf of the leg and his

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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knees bare. All moving in one saturnalia of color; in whirling dances, foursomes, eightsomes, reels, quick as jig steps, deliberate and stately as minuets, to the music of pipers, stepping daintily like cats on opposite sides of the hall; as though on some night of license all the brigands of opera bouffe danced at Versailles with the court beauties of Louis, and around this moving, twining, sometimes shouting, fantastic masquerade, the Red Bench.

And yet there is here no masquerade. This dress of the Highland chief, to the stranger fancy and theatric, has been observed in distant quarters of the world, to attend thus fancy and thus theatric upon the bitterness of death, in slaughter pens at night, under the rush of Zulus, in butchered squares, at midday, sweltering in the Soudan; and of an antiquity anterior to legend—worn by his father's father when he charged, screaming, against Cæsar.

At two o'clock on this night Caroline Childers came up out of the crowded ballroom for a moment's breathing, and sat down on the Red Bench. She was accompanied by the Duke of



"All moving in one saturnalia of color."



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## *The Red Bench*

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Dorset, one of the few men to be seen anywhere in plain evening clothes, except Cyrus Childers, who had but now taken the Marchesa Soderrelli in to supper. The Duke sat on the step below the girl, at her feet. On either side this bench stretched the red arc of its circle. Below it innumerable dancers whirled. This girl, her dark hair clouding her face, her wide dark eyes distinguishing the delicate outlines of her mouth and chin, resembled some idealized figure of legend.

One from a distant country, coming at this moment to the entrance of the hall, would have stopped there, wondering, with his shoulder resting against the posts of the doorway. Suppose him to have come ashore on this night, lost, after shipwreck and strange wanderings, after the sea had been over him, uncertain that he lived yet, he would have seen here that fairy sister of Arthur, dark haired, dreamy, wonderful, like this girl. Her council, old, wise, magnificent, sitting on this Red Bench, and below a fantastic dancing company. He would have believed himself come upon this hall



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## *The Gilded Chair*

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through the deeps of green water, into that vanished kingdom, situate by legend, between the Land's End and the isles of Scilly.

The Duke of Dorset, his broad back to the girl, his bronze face looking down on the crowded ballroom, was speaking, slowly, distinctly, like one pronouncing a conclusion.

"I understand now," he said, "why it has become the fashion to attend these Gatherings. It is the only place in the world where gentlemen wear the dress and do the dances of the aborigines."

The girl replied with a question, "You have traveled in many countries, then?"

"In most Eastern countries," said the Duke, "and I have seen nowhere anything like this. These fantastic steps, these striking costumes, this weird music is splendidly, is impressively barbaric."

But the girl was thinking of another matter. "Have you ever visited any Western countries?" she said.

"Not the continent of North America," replied the Duke.



"Then," she said, "you must come to visit me."

These words startled the Duke of Dorset. He had heard not a little of American disregard of conventions, but he was in no sense prepared for this abrupt, remarkable invitation.

"Then you will come to visit me!" spoken quietly, surely, like one in authority, by a girl under twenty, apparently but yesterday from the gardens of a convent. He could not imagine a girl of Italy, of France, of Austria, speaking words like those. A girl on the continent of Europe giving such an invitation would be mad, or something infinitely worse. Evidently all standards known to the people of the old world were unfitted to these people of the new.

The Marchesa Soderrelli was right when she thought him to have found here in the bay of Oban something which he had not believed to exist. He was wholly unable to place and classify this girl. She was strange, new, unbelievable. He felt himself as perplexed and astonished as if, on the border of the Sahara, he had come upon a panther like that one im-

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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agined by Balzac; or by accident, in some remote jungle of Hindustan, a leopard with wings. Instinctively he swung around his great shoulders and looked up into her face. There was nothing in that face to indicate that these words were other than ordinary. The girl sat straight as a pine, her chin lifted, her face shadowed by her dark hair, illumined by her dark eyes, imperious, as though these men in spangled coats, in bare knees, as though these women in rich colors, danced before her as before a Sheba. Instantly, as under the medium of this picture, the Duke of Dorset got a new light flashed onto those jarring words. Persons accustomed to be obeyed spoke sometimes like that. He sat a moment, silent, looking at the girl before he opened his mouth to reply; in that moment his opportunity departed.

The young girl arose. "The heat is oppressive," she said; "let us go out." And he followed her, skirting the crowds of dancers.

The door from the ballroom led first into a long scantily furnished antechamber, hung in yellow, and then into the street. This chamber,

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## *The Red Bench*

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now deserted, is, during the early hours of the ball, packed with women. Here, by a local custom, they remain until partners for their entire card have been selected. This room has been called facetiously "The Market." Because, here, in open competition, the débutante must win her place, and the veteran hold that which she has already won.

The two went through this room out into the street. The night, like those of this north country in summer, was in no sense dark. The sky was brightened, as in other countries it appears at dawn or twilight; one standing in the street could easily read the lines of a newspaper. The street was not deserted; others, oppressed by the heat and fatigue of the ballroom, had come out into the cool night. The pair walked slowly down toward the sea. They passed, now and then, a couple returning, and here and there, some girl and a Highlander seated on the step of a silent house; the man's kilt spread out to protect his companion's gown from the stone.

They came presently upon a bench under

the wall of a garden, and sat down there, looking out on the sea. The bay below the town blinked with lights; every yacht was illumined; some were hung from their masts with many colored lamps, others were etched in outline by strings of light, following their contour. The sea, meeting the horizon, was broken here and there with flecks of white, increasing with the distance; as though sirens sported—timid, modest sirens, flashing but an arm or the tip of a white shoulder where any human eye could see it, but in the security of distance tumbling their bodies in abandon.

Within the ballroom the Duke of Dorset had been able to regard this girl in a certain detached aspect, but here, now, on this bench before the sea, that sense of something intimate and personal assailed his faculties and possessed them. And there came with it a subtle illusion of the unreal creeping over the world, a faint insidious something, like the first effects of opium that one strives to drive away by dashing the face with water. And the source of this vague compelling dream, the thing from which

it issued, or the thing toward which, from far-off, mysterious sources, it approached, was this woman—this woman seated here beside him, this slender, exquisite girl.

This sudden, dominating impulse the man strongly resisted, but while he held it thus, he feared it. It was like those bizarre impulses which sometimes seize on the human mind and which, while we know them to be wild and fantastic, we feel that if we remain we shall presently accomplish them. He was glad when the girl spoke.

“I love the sea,” she said. Her face was lifted, the breath of the water seemed to move the cloudy mass of her hair gently, as though it wished to caress it. “It makes me feel that all the things which we are taught are only old wives’ tales, nevertheless, after all, are somehow true. Before the sea, I believe that the witches and the goblins live. I believe the genii dwell in their copper pots. I believe that somewhere, in the out-of-the-way places of the world, they all remain—these fairy people.”

She turned slowly toward her companion.

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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"Tell me," she said, "when you have traveled through the waste places of the earth, have you never come on a trail of them? Have you never found a magician walking in the desert? Or have you never looked into the open door of a hut, in some endless forest, and seen a big yellow-haired witch weaving at a loom; or in the bed of some dried-up river, a hideous dwarf, squatting on a rock, boiling a pot of water?"

"I have never found them," said the man.

"No," said the girl, "you would never find them. One never does find them, I suppose. But, did you never *nearly* find them? Did you never, in some big, lonely land at night, when everything was still, did you never catch some faint, eerie murmur, some wisp of music, some vague sound?"

"I have heard," replied the man, "far out in the Sahara, in that unknown country beyond the Zar'ez, which is simply an ocean of huge motionless billows of sand, at night in the endless valleys of this dry sea, I have heard the beating of a drum. No one understands this



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## *The Red Bench*

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tiny, fantastic drumming. It is said to be the echo of innumerable grains of sand blown against the hard blades of desert grasses, but no one knows. The Arabs say it is the dead. I suppose it is a sort of sound mirage."

"Oh, no," replied the girl, "it is not the dead; I know what it is. It is the little drums of the fairy people traveling in the desert, hunting a land where they may not be disturbed. We have driven them out of the forest, and away from the rivers and the hills. Poor little people, how they must hate the hot yellow sand, when they remember the cool wood, and the bright water, and the green hills! I am sure that if you had crept out toward that sound you would have seen the tiny drummers, in their quaint scarlet caps, beating their little drums to awake the fairy camp, and you would have seen the moon lying on this camp, and the cob-web tents, and all the little carts filled with their household things."

The fresh salt air seemed to vitalize her face; her eyes, big, vague, dreamy, looked out on the sea; her hands were in her lap; her body un-

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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moving. She was like a child absorbed in the wonder of a story.

“But the others,” she said, “the magicians and the witches and the wicked kings and the beautiful princesses, they would live in cities. Have you not nearly found these cities? Have you not seen the turrets and the spires and the domes of them mirrored in the shimmering heat of some far-off waste horizon? Or have you not looked up suddenly in some barren country of great rocks and beheld a walled town with fantastic towers and then, when you advanced, found it only a trick of vision? That would be one of their cities.”

All at once the man recalled a memory. A memory that suddenly presented itself, as though it were a fragment of some big luminous conception that he could not quite get hold of. A memory that was like a familiar landmark come upon in some unknown country where one was lost. He leaned forward.

“On the coast of Brittany,” he said, “there is a great dreary pool of the sea like dead water, and one looking into it can see faintly

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## *The Red Bench*

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far down walls of ancient masonry, barely visible. The peasants say that this is a submerged city. The king of it was old and wicked, and God sent a saint to say that He would destroy the city. And the king replied, 'Am not I, whom you can see, greater than God, whom you cannot see?' And he was tenfold more wicked. And God wearied of his insolence; and one night the saint appeared before the king and said, 'God's wrath approaches.' And he took the king's daughter by the hand and went to the highest tower of the palace. And a stranger, who had entered the city on this day, arose up and followed them, not because he feared God, but because he loved the king's daughter. And suddenly the sea entered and filled the city. And the saint and the king's daughter escaped walking on the water. And the stranger tried to follow and he did follow, staggering and sinking in the water to his knees.

"Well, one summer night my uncle slept at the little house of a curé on this coast of Brittany, and in the night he arose and went out of the

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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house, and the curé heard the latch of the door move, and he got up and followed. When he came to this pool he saw my uncle walking in the sea and he was lurching like a man whose feet sank in the sand. The curé was alarmed and he shouted, and when he shouted, my uncle went suddenly down as though he had stepped off a ledge into deep water, but he came up and swam to the shore. The curé asked him why he had left his bed and come down to this dead pool. My uncle was confused. He hesitated, excused himself, and finally answered that the night was hot and he wished to bathe in the sea."

"And your uncle," said the girl, "was he—was he young then?"

"Yes," replied the man, "he was young. He was as young as I am."

"And was he like you?"

"I am very like him," replied the man. "The servants used to say that he got himself re-born."

"And the woman," said the girl, "what was she like?"

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## *The Red Bench*

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The man leaned over toward the motionless figure of the girl.

"The story says," he replied, "that 'her hair was like spun darkness and her eyes like the violet core of the night.'"

Suddenly, from the almost invisible warship etched in lights, with the jarring scream of a projectile, a rocket arose and fled hissing into the sky.

The man and the girl sprang up. The tense moment was shattered as by a blow. They remained without a word, looking down at the sea. A second rocket arose, and another as the warship added its bit of glitter to the gala night.

They returned slowly, walking side by side, without speaking, toward the Gathering hall. The salt air had wilted the girl's gown. It clung to her slim figure, giving it that appealing sweetness that the damp night gives to the body of a woman. The street was now empty. The reel of Tullough had drawn in the kilted soldier and his sweetheart.

Presently the man spoke, "How little," he said, "your brother is like you."

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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"I have no brother," replied the girl.

The man stopped. "No brother?" he said. "Then — then who was that man — that man whose picture is in the yacht there?"

He looked down at the girl standing there in the gray dawn in the empty street; her hair loosened and threatening to tumble down; her slender face alluring like a flower, and for background, the weird, eerie morning of the North lying on a deserted city.

"I think," she said, "there is a forgotten portion of your legend. I think that saint of God saved the princess from something more than death."



## CHAPTER XI

### THE CHART OF THE TREASURE

WHEN the Duke of Dorset came into the hotel dining room at ten o'clock for breakfast, he met a hall boy, calling his name and "letter please," after the manner of the English hostelry. He sat down at a table, thrust a knife under the flap of the letter and ripped it open. He took out the folded paper within and bent it back across his fingers. The paper was an outline map of the Pacific Coast of the United States. Merely a tracing like those maps used commonly on liners to indicate the day's run. It was marked with a cross in ink, at a point off the coast of Oregon, and signed across the bottom "Caroline Childers."

The Duke arose and went over to the window. The white yacht, lying last night at anchor, was going now out of the bay of Oban, the smoke pouring from her stacks. The gulls attended her, the sun danced on her painted flanks, and the green water, boiling under lace, ran hissing

in two furrows, spreading like a V from her screw. The Duke remained standing in the window, his shoulders thrown loosely forward, his hand clenched and resting on the sill, the open map in his fingers. The yacht saluted the warship, dipping her colors, and turned westward slowly into the channel. Her proportions descended gradually into miniature. The smoke crawled lazily in thinner wisps along the sky landward from her funnels. The sea was a pot of molten glass, green as verdigris far down under the light, and polished on the surface like a crystal. Over this water, easily, without a sound, without the swinging of a davit, the yacht moved out slowly to the sea like something crawling on a mirror.

The Duke of Dorset was not prepared for this sudden departure of the yacht. Certain vague detached impressions had, during the night, got themselves slowly into form. Certain incidents, apparently unrelated, had moved one around the other into a sort of sequence. He was beginning to see, he thought, to what end certain events were on the way.

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## *The Chart of the Treasure*

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For fully twenty minutes the Duke stood in the window watching the departing yacht, his jaw thrust forward, the muscles of his face hardening, his clinched fingers bearing heavily on the sill. Then, he turned back slowly, deliberately, into the dining room, folded the map, put it into his pocket, went out to the clerk's cage, paid his bill with a five-pound note, ordered his luggage sent at once to the railway station, and went down the steps of the hotel into the street.

The visitors overland to Oban were in exodus; lorries passed him piled high with black leather trunks, boxes, bags, and travelling rugs; old women passed, sallow, haggard from the nights' chaperoning; girls, worn out and sleepy; men looking a stone thinner from seven hours of dancing; Highlanders in kilts, pipers, sailors, crowded around the doors of public houses, blinking in the sun. From behind these doors came oaths, bits of ribald songs, the unsteady voices of the drunken.

Here and there a yacht lifting its anchor steamed slowly out of the bay following that

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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first one, now visible only as a picture etched on the horizon. Stupid sea birds, their shoulders drawn up, their beaks drooping, stood about the beach, or eyed leisurely the line of salvage thrust up by the tide. At the dock the day boat for Fort William and the north was taking on its cargo, and on mid deck, as a sort of lure, a little thin man with a wizened receding face was picking out swinging modern waltzes on a zither. His fingers moving nimbly as a monkey's, and his face following in sympathy his fingers with little nods and jerks, inconceivably grotesque.

The Duke went into the train shed, got a seat in a compartment and returned to Doune. He was not, on this day, annoyed by the asperities of travel, although the whole train south was packed, like a Brighton coach with trippers. He sat crowded on either side by a loose-jointed baronet and his equally masculine wife, who snapped at each other across him like trapped timber wolves. An old lady of some country house, raw with her long vigil, lectured her niece on the personal supervision of luggage.

'And by the door a betartaned female slept audibly, unconscious that she rode south badged by two clans between which, after many hundred years, lies still the bitterness of death; her cap Glencoe MacDonald, her skirt a dress plaid of the Glen Lion Campbells; not since the massacre had one person worn the two of them.

It was a hard, uncomfortable journey after a night on one's feet, but the annoyance of it did not reach inward to the Duke of Dorset. He sat oblivious to this environment. He was holding here a review of the last two days and nights; as he visualized their incidents he seemed to come, now and then, upon events indicating a certain order, as though directed by some authority invisible behind the machinery of the world. The coming of this girl to Oban seemed something cleaner to a purpose than a mere whim of chance. And yet, looked at from another point of view, it was a mere coincidence. This review was like work expended on a cipher, or rather characters that might or might not be cipher. Characters set thus by

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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accident and meaning nothing, or by design, with a story to be read.

The Duke of Dorset came on this evening to his house, with the problem still turning in his mind. The mystery lying about the Marchesa Soderrelli when she appeared at Old Newton was now clear enough. To give herself a certain importance at Biarritz, she had boasted an acquaintance with him. She had promised to produce him at Oban. She had sought thus to attach herself to these wealthy Americans. It was a bit of feminine strategy, but could he condemn it? An atmosphere of pity lay about the Marchesa Soderrelli. The Marquis of Soderrelli, earning his damnation, had been paid off at God's window—he was dead now—and she was free. And she had come forth, like that Florentine, from hell, her beauty fading, her youth required of her. She was no lay figure of drama, plotting behind a domino. She was only a tired woman, whose youth a profligate had squandered, making what she could, with courage, of the fragments. Was it any wonder, then, that she kept fast hold of this



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## *The Chart of the Treasure*

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new hand, that she sought, with every little artifice, to bind this girl to her?

In his heart he could find no criticism for her. He found rather a certain admiration for this woman, who swam with such courage after her galleon was sunk; who presented herself, not as wetting the ashes of her life with tears, but as blowing on the embers of her courage.

When the Duke of Dorset reached his house every physical thing there seemed to present an unfamiliar aspect. The form of nothing had changed, but the essence of everything had changed. He seemed to arrive, awakened, in a place which he had hitherto inhabited in a sort of somnambulism. There lay about the house an atmosphere of loneliness—of desolation. There was no physical reason for this change; it was as though the peace of his house had been removed by some angered prophet's curse. He seemed, somehow, to have come within the circle of an invisible magic, wherein old, hidden, mysterious influences labored at some great work. He had stepped out of the world into this circle at Oban. What was there about this

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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dark-haired, slender girl that effected this sorcery? On the instant, as at a signal, he felt the pull of some influence as old and resistless as that drawing the earth in its orbit.

He stood that night at the window looking out at the white fairy village beyond the Ardoch, and suddenly he realized that all of his life he had been comparing other women with this girl. He had not understood this. He had not understood that he was comparing them with anyone, but he was. When he had gauged the charming qualities of a woman, he had gauged them against a standard. And now, he saw what that standard was.

But before he had seen, wherefrom had he the knowledge of this standard? Wherefrom, indeed! For a moment the idea seemed like some new and overpowering conception, then he remembered, that from this thing — this very thing — the ancients had drawn the conclusion that the soul of man had existed before he was born. And he recalled fragments of the argument.

“[A] man sees something and thinks to him-

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## *The Chart of the Treasure*

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self, 'This thing that I see aims at being like some other thing, but it comes short, and cannot be like that other thing; it is inferior'; must not the man who thinks that have known, at some previous time, that other thing, which he says that it resembles and to which it is inferior?"

And the memory of that old legend, which had come so strikingly into his mind, in the moment, with the girl before the sea, returned to him. Was there truth shadowing in this fable? And there attended it the recollection of that insolent, aggressive face which he had seen on the yacht, and the girl's words as they returned along the deserted street. But with it came the feeling that this man was in himself nothing, he was only the creature, the receptive creature of that strange, powerful old man's design. And he seemed to know an ancient enemy in this old man, and to move again in some dim, forgotten struggle.

He determined to set out at once for Canada. A big, open, primeval land, with its bright rivers, its mountains, its deserts, would cleanse him of these fancies.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE SERVANTS OF YAHVEH

THE Duke of Dorset was mistaken when he imagined that a new land would rid him of these fancies. To remove a passion to the desert, a wise man hath written, is but to raise it to its triumph.

He had gone directly to Quebec, and from there traveled swiftly across Canada to the Pacific Coast. In Vancouver he was soon wearied, restless, overcome with ennui. His rifle and its ammunition lay unpacked in an ordinary traveling box. The lure of the mountains, the rivers, the silent barren places, had somehow departed from before him.

In this mood he met the Captain of His Majesty's gunboat, the *Cleavewaive*. He had known this man in the East; for a fortnight they had stalked tigers in the mountainous country south of the Amur. The man was by nature a hunter. The forest was in his blood. Life by rote and

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## *The Servants of Yahveh*

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the narrow discipline of the service irked him. His idea of paradise was not unlike that of the Dakota.

Fourteen days in the wilderness bring men of any station to a certain understanding for life. The talk ran on big game killed here and there, in out-of-the-way places of the earth, and memories of that fortnight in Manchuria. Such conversations are not apt to run for long without touching a little on the future. It came out presently that the gunboat was about to make its annual run, south along the coast of the United States, in the general interest of British shipping, and to show the flag.

The Captain of the *Cleavewaive*, finding the Duke bored and at leisure, asked him to come on this cruise. He wished the Duke to accept for a certain close and personal reason. A larger importance would attach to the cruise from his presence, and this was to be thought of, but to do the man justice, this was not primarily his object. He was one of those men who, prevented by necessity from living the life that he longed for, sought constantly his experiences

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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of it at second hand. Since he must needs thus follow the sea, he craved, with a consuming hunger, the taste of conversation running on the forest, the plain, the trackless mountain. The Duke of Dorset had lived in all of its richness, the very life which this man, had his destiny been open, would have chosen for himself.

For the hope then of talk running on these delectable experiences, he labored to win over the Duke to this voyage. He was not hopeful that he would succeed, and so he was surprised when the Duke finally accepted his invitation.

The Captain of the *Cleavewaive*, having got his guest aboard, at first, took nothing from this fortune. The Duke of Dorset was now, strangely, no longer that mighty hunter with whom he had talked at Vancouver. On the gunboat he was a silent, reserved, impenetrable Englishman, hedged about by distances which no inferior could cross, meeting every advance with courtesy and silence. He talked conventionally, he looked over the gunboat at the Captain's invitation, noticed the structure of it, and



made a word or two of comment when it seemed to be expected.

On the first evening of the voyage the Captain labored to draw him into conversation, but the manner of the Duke was now polite and formal, and the Captain, seeking a way inward to the man, was always turned deftly aside, until presently he gave over the effort.

The gunboat was delayed by heavy seas. The second day passed like the evening of the first, to the discomfiture of this ship's Captain. The Duke of Dorset was silent, courteous, and interested only in the sea. He sat in his deck chair watching through the afternoon the long polished swells—black, smooth as ebony, and rhythmic—in the hollows of which the sea birds rode. And at night, watching the uncanny mystery of this iron shell wrestling its way through the sea, shouldered from one side to the other, heaved up and pitched forward, assailed with every trick, and artifice, and cunning, with steady lifting and savage desperate rushes; the sea always failing to throw this black invader fairly on his shoulders, but never for one in-

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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stant, never for one fraction of an instant, ceasing to assail him. And always, as it failed, growling, snarling, sputtering with a rage immeasurable and hideous. Then, when the moon opened like a red door, skyward out of the world, the sea changed as under some enchantment; a golden river welled up on the horizon and ran down toward that one looking seaward from his chair. On the instant he was in a kingdom of the fairy, and illusions, fantastic, unreal, took on under this magic the very flesh and blood of life.

On this second night of the run the Duke of Dorset, sitting alone on the deck, put his hand into his pocket, took out the map that Caroline Childers had sent to him at Oban, tore off the strip at the bottom on which her name was written, pulled that strip deliberately to bits, and tossed the scraps of paper over into the sea. Then he arose, walked across the deck into the cabin of the navigating officer, and put the map down on the table before that officer.

“Lieutenant,” he said, “how near is this point, marked here in ink, to the ship’s course?”

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## *The Servants of Yahveh*

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The officer got out his charts, located the point, and made roughly an estimate of the distance.

“We pass this point, sir.”

“On what day?” inquired the Duke.

“On to-morrow morning, sir,” replied the officer.

“I thank you,” replied the Duke of Dorset. “I wish to be put ashore there.” Then he went out.

It is a theory that good fortune travels usually close on the heels of despair. The Captain of the *Cleavewaive*, as his boat ran south, verified that theory. The Duke of Dorset sat with him for the remainder of this night in his cabin, and in the smoke of it, the talk ran constantly on the wilderness. He was again, as under the sprinkling of some magic water, that primordial man of the wild, whom the Captain so extravagantly envied.

In the cabin, while the moon walked on the water, and the great swells slipped one over the other silently, and that sinister desperate wrestling went endlessly on, the Duke of Dorset

charmed and thrilled this sailor with the soul of a Dakota. He led him, panting with fatigue, through the vast, silent forests of Lithuania, day after day, in a path cut down like a ditch by the hoofs of a hundred beasts, one following the other—beasts, that the hunter, now himself a beast, running with the rifle in his hand, his hair caked with dirt, his body streaming with sweat, his heart lusting to kill, could never gain on.

He led him, shriveling with thirst, down the beds of lost rivers, where there was no green thing, no thing with a drop of moisture, only the dull red earth baking eternally under a sun that stood always above it like a disk of copper.

He led him, chattering with cold, across bleak steppes where the wind blew like a curse of God, set there to see that no man passed that way and lived; blew and blew, until it became a thing hideous and maddening, a thing damnable and accursed, coming out of a hell that froze; and the hunter, driven mad, his face raw, his hands bleeding, his bones aching to the marrow, no longer able to go forward, sat on the

earth with his head between his knees and howled.

The Captain of the *Cleavewaive*, set thus living the life he longed for, forgot to be astonished at the strange course which the Duke of Dorset had elected to follow. When the navigating officer had carried to him the Duke's direction, he had been greatly puzzled. There was better hunting in British Columbia than here, some deer and a bear now and then, but nothing to tempt a man over seas with his gun cases. But the mystery of it was a thing inconsequential beside the pleasing fortune which this changed plan carried individually to him, and he easily left it. He was living, through the medium of this man's adventures, vicariously, that big, open, alluring life of the first man running with the wolf in the morning of the world. He was harking back with joy to those elements, primal and savage, by virtue of which all things fight desperately to live. These things were not to be found in books, they were not to be invented, they were known only to those haunting the waste places of the earth.

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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The Captain of the *Cleavewaive* was, then, pleased to carry out any plan of his guest. He was quite willing to go into the coast at the point selected by the Duke of Dorset, or at any point within a reasonable run.

At sunrise, the gunboat, turning due east out of her course, anchored off a little bay on the Oregon coast of the United States. The mountains came, at this point, down to the sea; a great chain rising landward and covered with firs, standing a primeval forest. The bay was a perfect miniature harbor protected by a crooked finger of the mountain; the inner border of this finger was a sea wall with steps coming down to the water. A small, gray-stone house, not unlike a gamekeeper's lodge, stood behind this wall on the summit of the finger, flanked by two giant firs, lifting their brown, naked bodies, without a limb, two hundred feet into the sky.

The Captain of the *Cleavewaive* hesitated to put the Duke ashore in a place so evidently deserted. He pointed out that the bay was merely a private yacht harbor, used doubtless



in summer, but now in the autumn abandoned for the winter. There was no boat of any kind to be seen in the bay, and no evidence that the place was inhabited. But the Duke was unmoved in his determination to go ashore at this point; and his boxes were got up from his cabin. While these preparations went forward, the Captain, searching the coast with his glass, saw a man come out from behind the stone house on the summit of the promontory. The man stopped when he observed the gunboat, looked at it a moment under the palm of his hand, and came down with long swinging strides to the point on the sea wall where the stone steps descended into the water.

When the Duke came ashore at this point, the man swinging along the sea wall was already there. He stood back some twenty feet from the landing, waiting until the sailors should bring the Duke's boxes up the stone stairway, and return to the gunboat. Then he spoke, nodding his head to the Duke:

“Good mornin’, stranger,” he said, in a big deliberate voice that drew out each word as

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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though it were elastic, stretching from his throat over his tongue to his teeth.

The Duke, standing on the sea wall among his boxes, regarded the man with an interest, every moment visibly increasing. He had never until this day, in any country, come upon this type of peasant. The man was past sixty, but indefinitely past it; one could not say how old he was. He might have been five or ten, or only a year or two beyond it. He was big-boned, slouchy, and powerful; his eyes, mild and blue; his face, sinewy and weather-beaten; he wore a shirt without a collar, and fastened at the throat with a big white button; suspenders, hand knitted of blue wool; and trousers tucked into the tops of enormous cowhide boots. His head was covered with a big felt hat, rain-stained, sweat-stained, and mould-stained, until it was a color that no maker ever dreamed of.

The Duke returned the salutation and inquired if he were on the estate of Mr. Cyrus Childers.

"He calls it his'n," replied the native, "but to my notion no man owns the mountains."

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## *The Servants of Yahveh*

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The Duke's interest increased. "Are you a servant of Mr. Childers?" he asked.

The man's mouth drew down into a long firm slit.

"Well, no, stranger," he answered, "I don't use that air word 'servant,' except when I pray to God Almighty."

"Ah!" said the Duke, and he remembered that he was in the United States of America.

The native went on with the conversation, "I reckon," he said, "you're on your way over to the big house."

The Duke divined the man's meaning, and explained that he had come ashore from the departing gunboat, under the impression that there was a village here, and some means of transportation to the residence of Mr. Childers. In reply the mountaineer talked deliberately for perhaps five minutes. Much of the idiom was to the Duke unintelligible, but he understood from it that this bay was a private yacht harbor, that the yacht was on the Atlantic Coast, that the keeper's lodge here was closed, and that Mr. Childers's residence was not near

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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to this point, as he expected, but farther inland. The Duke inquired the distance from the coast.

The native screwed up the muscles on one side of his face, "Hit's a right smart step," he said.

The Duke was reassured, "You mean," he ventured, "three or four miles?"

The mountaineer seemed to ponder the thing a moment seriously, then he answered, "Well," he said, "I reckon hit's further than three or four mile. I reckon hit's purty nigh on to forty-eight mile."

The Duke of Dorset laughed over his own astonishment. He was beginning to like this new type of peasant, who spoke of forty-eight miles as "a right smart step," who thought no man owned the mountains, and who reserved the word "servant" exclusively for his prayers.

The man looked seriously at the smiling face of the Duke and repeated the substance of his first query. "I reckon," he said, "you're a-wantin' to git over to the big house."

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## *The Servants of Yahveh*

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"I should like it," replied the Duke, "but the prospect does not seem favorable."

"I might give you a lift," the man replied hesitatingly, a bit timidly, as though he asked rather than offered a favor.

The words attached themselves to no exact meaning in the Duke's mind, but he understood the intent of them.

"Have you a cart here?" he said.

"No," replied the man, shaking his head; "I hain't got no cyart, but I've got a mewel." Then he pointed to the Duke's boxes. "If you leave them air contraptions," he went on, "you kin ride the mewel an' I'll walk; but if them air contraptions has got to go, we'll load 'em on the mewel, and both of us walk." Then, he added, jerking his head over his shoulder, "She's back there in the bushes."

The Duke, following the line indicated by this gesture and expecting to see there a donkey, saw such a domestic animal as he had never before this day observed in the service of the human family. It was a mule at least seventeen hands high, big-boned and gaunt like its owner;



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## *The Gilded Chair*

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the hair worn off bare to the skin in great patches on the beast's flanks and withers—marks of the plow. The mule seemed to the Duke to have fallen into the same listless slovenly attitude as that which marked so strikingly the carriage of its master. The resemblance between the two seemed a thing come slowly by intimate association through a lifetime, a thing brought forth by common environment. The beast's trappings were no less distinctive; the bridle was made of rope, smaller than one's little finger, without brow-band or throat-latch, merely a head loop fastened to a bit; the saddle was a skeleton wood frame covered with rawhide; across this saddle hung a gunny sack with something in either end of it.

The Duke looked at the lank beast and then down at his articles of luggage. "Do you think your animal can carry these boxes?" he said.

The mountaineer made a contemptuous gesture. "Jezebel will tote them traps an' not turn a hair," he answered; "hit's the hoofin' hit I'm apesterin' about."

The latter part of this remark the Duke did



not wholly follow. While he hesitated to embarrass this good-natured person by inquiring what he meant, the man came over and lifted the various boxes, one after the other, in his big sun-tanned hands. Then he stepped back, and rested these big hands on his hips. "Yes," he drawled, "if you git wore out, I kin pack 'em an' you kin ride a spell."

The Duke understood now, and he was utterly astonished. This curious person actually thought of carrying these boxes, in order that he might ride the mule. He realized also within the last five minutes, that the usual manner of speech to a servant was conspicuously out of place here. That this man, big and elemental, required a relation direct and likewise elemental. The Duke stepped down at once into that primitive relation. He walked over directly in front of the mountaineer. "Look at me closely," he said, "do I look like a man who would ride while another man walked and carried his luggage?"

The mountaineer ran his mild-blue eyes over the Duke's big sinewy shoulders, then he

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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moved over his woolen braces a trifle with his thumb.

"You mightn't be toughened to it," he said, apologetically.

The Duke doubled his right arm up in its good tweed sleeve, and presented it to the mountaineer's fingers. The muscles under that sleeve sat together, compact and hard as bunches of ivory. Doubt and anxiety departed slowly from the man's face. He made no comment. He removed his hand from the Duke's arm and set off to bring his mule. In a few minutes he returned with that animal and a piece of tarred rope which he had got from some boathouse back of the keeper's lodge.

He lifted the sack from the saddle and set it carefully down. "I'll pack that," he said, by way of explanation, "hit'll jist balance me." And he began to tie pieces of the luggage to the saddle; but the Duke of Dorset instantly took over this part of the preparation for the journey. He had adjusted loads to cavalry horses in India, to donkeys in the Caucasian Mountains, to hairy vicious ponies in Russia,

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## *The Servants of Yahveh*

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and he knew how to lay the pack so it would sit snug and firm to the beast. It was fortunate that he stood on this morning an expert in this craft, for the boxes made a difficult pack to manage with the primitive saddle.

When it was done the mountaineer tested it with his big forefinger hooked between the beast's belly and the rope. He arose from the test with an approving nod, glanced at the sun, standing over bay, and spoke his word of comment.

"Hit's a purty job," he said, "an' we better be a-hoofin' it." And this time the Duke of Dorset understood that expressive idiom.

The man lifted his sack tenderly onto his shoulder, slipped the rope bridle over his arm, and set out along the sea wall eastward toward the mountain.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE JOURNEYING

THE road into which they presently came astonished the Duke of Dorset. It was sixty feet wide, smooth as a boulevard and drained with tile. It was supported below by a stone wall, surmounted by a balustrade, and was protected from the slipping of the mountain, at certain points, by a parallel stone wall equally massive. It was covered brown and soft with a carpet of fir needles, and arose in an easy grade above the sea, turning northeastward into the mountains. Strewn with the foliage of autumn, the fir needles, wisps of yellow fern, bits of branches swept together against the stone wall by the wind, it seemed a thing toned and softened into harmony with the wilderness through which it ran.

The stone balustrade set there, naked and jarring, by the builder, had been planted along its border with vines. Vines massed the whole

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## *The Journeying*

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of it; vines patched, laced, and streaked with crimson, with yellow, with green of a thousand shades, moving from one color imperceptibly into another. The wall, too, set against the face of the mountain was thus screened and latticed. The vines fed with dampness from the earth behind the wall were almost wholly green, while those banking the balustrade were largely crimson, a mass of scarlet, flecked with dead leaves, falling now and then, with a faint crackling like tiny twigs snapping in a fire.

The scene was a thing fantastic and tropical. Below was the sea, to the eye oiled and polished, bedded with opal, shifting in the light; and above were the gigantic firs, their brown bodies standing close in a sort of twilight, cast by the verdigris branches crowded together, shutting out the sky; and between, the road crept upward, winding across ravines into the mountains, banked with green and scarlet, and carpeted soft to the foot with brown.

Hurriedly—with a haste incomparable—the wilderness had adopted this intruder; within five years it had covered from sight every trace

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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of human fingers; the work had been swiftly done, and yet carried the effect of years leisurely expended. Nature returning with all things slowly to the wilderness centuries after man was dead. The Duke of Dorset was not a person easily swung skyward by a bit of sun and color. He was accustomed to that brooding mood, lying over solitary lands; to the dignity, to the majestic silence, obtaining in the courts of Nature; to the gorgeous pageantry of that fantastic empress; to the strange, almost human hurry with which she strove to obliterate any trace of man encroaching on her kingdom. And yet, he could not recall anything on the continent of Europe equal to this scene, unless the mountain behind the great road leading to Amalfi, above the Mediterranean, were again clothed with that primeval forest marked by the Phœnician.

The Duke followed behind the big swinging mountaineer and his gaunt, gigantic mule, all moving without a sound, over the bed of soft fir needles, along this road thus clothed and colored as though infinitely old. They might



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## *The Journeying*

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have been traveling on some highway of that mighty fabled empire for which Fernando de Soto hunted the wilderness, with men in armor.

It was a day of autumn, soft in this Western country. A time of Indian summer, the sky deep blue, with here and there a cloud island, unmoving as though painted on a canvas. The mountain chain running northward along the coast faded imperceptibly into haze. Above and within the immediate sweep of the eye the day was bright, but when the eye lifted to a distance the haze deepened, as with smoke coming somewhere from behind the world.

The Duke of Dorest lengthened his stride and came up to the mountaineer. He wished to know something about this remarkable estate, having the sea and wilderness for boundary. He wondered how old it was, how long this road had been built—the work looked like the labor of centuries.

“How long has Mr. Childers owned this estate?” inquired the Duke.

“About ten year, I reckon,” replied the man.

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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“And before that,” said the Duke, “who owned it?”

The mountaineer, lifting his chin, took a deep breath and exhaled it slowly between his lips.

“Well, stranger,” he drawled, “I reckon God Almighty owned hit before that.”

“You mean,” said the Duke, “that this whole estate was then wilderness as I see it here?”

“Jist as the blessed God made hit,” replied the man, “before He rested on the seventh day.”

The Duke understood now something of the plan of this American Childers. He had secured, here on the coast, a great tract of wild, primeval forest, and was making of it an estate suited to his fancy. He smiled at the assurance of one assuming a labor so gigantic. Either the man was a dreamer, forgetting the brevity of life, or he was Pharaoh, or more likely yet, a fool. It took three hundred years to make a garden; and yet here was a great wilderness cleaned of its fallen timber and climbing

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## *The Journeying*

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through the mountain was this road—the work surely of no little man steeped in fancies. The Duke, pricked to wonder, strove to draw from the mountaineer some idea of this man, but he got in answer a jumble of extravagance and prophécý, drawled out in a medley of idiom, imagery, and scrappy biblical excerpts.

Childers was like those seditious persons who had builded the Tower of Tongues, like that one who had embellished Babylon; he had come into the West, got this great tract of virgin country, “an’ set up shop agin’, God Almighty!” The man made a great sweeping gesture, covering the mountains to the east. Who was Childers to change what God was pleased with? This night, or on some night desperately near, his soul would be required of him. He was over eighty. Did he hope to live forever? He had finished the term allotted man to live, and by reason of strength, had made it fourscore years. Did he think that Death, riding his pale horse, had forgotten the road leading to his door? Pride goeth before destruction! But this was something more than pride. It was a sort of

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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sedition—a sedition that Jehovah would put down with the weapon of iron and the steel bow.

The declamation amused and puzzled the Duke of Dorset. He attributed the motive of it to the universal dislike of the peasant for the landed proprietor, to the distress with which the aborigine sees his forest felled and his rivers bridged. But the speech of it; the biblical words with which it was clothed; the intimate knowledge of the Hebrew Scripture which it indicated, was a thing, in this illiterate mountaineer, wholly incredible.

The man was swinging forward with long strides; the gunny sack across his shoulder; the mule's bridle over the crook of his arm; his tanned face stolid as leather. The Duke, walking beside him, put the question moving in his mind.

“My friend,” he said, “what trade is it that you follow?”

The man walked on a moment, as though uncertain in what catalogue of trades he should be listed. He put up his hand and loosed the

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## *The Journeying*

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white button on his shirt, leaving his broad-corded throat, tanned like his face, open to the air. He thrust his thumb under his woolen brace, lifted it slowly, and moved his thumb down from the shoulder to the trousers button. Finally he spoke, coupling his vocations, since he was not able to say that either occupied exclusively his talents.

“ Well, stranger,” he said, “ I crap some, an’ I preach the Word.”

The Duke did not understand this answer, and he probed for a further explanation. He learned that the man was not a native, that he had come here from the great range of mountains running along the western border of Virginia. He had come, as he believed, by a Divine direction. The angel of the Lord had appeared to him and said: “ Arise and get thee across the desert into the wilderness, for God hath there a work for thee to do.” And he had obeyed, as Philip before him had obeyed, when that angel had directed him to go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is a desert.



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## *The Gilded Chair*

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The Duke of Dorset vaguely understood then that the man was some sort of little farmer and some sort of priest, come hither on some imagined mission. But he had no idea of the circuit rider, that primitive, sturdy, religious enthusiast who believed in a God of vengeance and a hell of fire, as the Scriptures said it; who took his theology from no school of cardinals, from no articles of faith; who recognized no man standing between himself and God; who read the Bible and no other book—moving his broad finger slowly along under the line—and took that Book to mean literally what it said. A servant of God, but of no authority below Him. And yet a mountaineer, illiterate and narrow, poor as the peasants of Russia, tilling a bit of land for the barest necessities of life, and traveling incredible distances to the cabin church for no pay save that promise to him beyond the reach of rust.

The Duke of Dorset got his answer, and he got something more than that, he got his question back. He had opened the door, and he could not immediately close it.



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## *The Journeying*

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“An’ you, stranger,” the man had added, “what might you do?”

The Duke smiled to find this question as difficult for him as it had been for his companion. He walked as far and he took as long a time to answer as the mountaineer. He was greatly amused, but he was also somewhat puzzled. He found himself fingering his chin, thumbing his waistcoat, like this farmer priest. Then he laughed. “I believe I could get a living with the rifle,” he said, “if I had to do it.”

The man took the answer in all seriousness and with composure.

“Well,” he said, drawling the words as though they were a reminiscence, “this were a great huntin’ country, I reckon, before Childers set up fur God Almighty.”

The mountaineer lifted his sack from one shoulder carefully to the other, glanced up at the sun, standing above the mountain, and clucked to his mule. The Duke of Dorset, walking beside the man, studied him through the corner of his eye. The bulk and sinew of the man contrasted strangely with his gentle manner.

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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His words of withering invective contrasted still more conspicuously with the drawling gentle tone in which they were spoken. The Duke of Dorset was acquainted with the mad priest, the passionate fanatic, furious, lashing, but here was one who said these things softly, with no trace of feeling, like one speaking a doom as gently as he could.

The Duke began to regard the man with a newer interest. He wondered on what errand the man was going when he found him, and what it was that he carried so tenderly in his sack, as though it were a thing fragile and delicate. He had seen a Scottish gillie carry jugs of whisky carefully like that in the ends of a bag swung over a pony. With the thought he gave the sack a little closer notice. He observed that the mountaineer attended thus carefully to but one end of the sack, the end which he carried over his shoulder on his chest, the other end he left to pound and swing as it liked.

At noon the great road, winding in a gentle grade around the mountain, spanning its gullies

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## *The Journeying*

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with stone arches, reached the summit, and the mountaineer turned out, following a trail along the ridge to a knoll—covered, as the road was, with a carpet of brown fir needles, and bordered with a few old trees, huge and wind shaken. Below this knoll, welling out over the roots of trees, was a spring of water, running into a bowl, deep as a bucket, cut out of the rock. The men drank and then the mule thrust her nose up to the eye pits into the crystal water and gulped it down in great swallows, that ran like a chain of lumps, one after the other, under the skin of her gullet. The mountaineer removed the sack carefully from his shoulder, and opened the end which had been swinging all the morning against his back. This end of the sack contained oats, and clearing a place on the ground with his foot, he poured the oats down for the mule's dinner; then, he got out a strip of raw bacon, wrapped in a greasy paper, some boiled potatoes, a baked grouse, and what the Duke took to be a sort of scone, very thick and very yellow.

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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“I reckon we wont stop to do no cookin’ jist now,” the mountaineer observed apologetically, and returned the bacon to its greasy wrapper. Then he opened his hands over the frugal luncheon.

“Strengthen us with this heah food, O God Almighty! so our hands kin be strong to war, an’ our fingers to fight agin the Devil an’ his angels.”

And the two men ate, as men eat together in the wilderness, without apology and without comment. When he had finished, the Duke of Dorset stretched himself out on the warm fir needles with a cigarette in his fingers.

The mountaineer took a pipe out of his trousers pocket, the bowl, a fragment of Indian corncob, the stem cut from an elder sprout, and with it some tobacco. He looked at the Duke a moment hesitating, with the articles in his hand, then he said: “Stranger, air you in a right smart hurry?”

The Duke opened his eyes; above him was the sky, deep, blue, fathomless, latticed out by the crossing fir tops; under him the bed was soft

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## *The Journeying*

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and warm, the pungent air of the forest crept into his lungs like opium.

“No,” he answered, “why hurry out of a paradise like this.” Then he dropped the cigarette from his fingers and lay motionless, looking out over the world of forest. The mountaineer filled his pipe, crumbling the tobacco in his hard palm, lighted it with a sputtering sulphur match and smoked, leaning back against the giant tree trunk—a figure of incomparable peace.

Presently the Duke of Dorset, looking landward across the mountains, dreamy, soft, rising into a sky of haze, caught a bit of deepened color, a patch of some darker haze lying above the distant sky line—lifting a wisp of black, and spreading faintly, like a blot against that shimmering nimbus in which the world was swimming. The thing caught and held the Duke’s wayward attention. He sat up and pointed his finger eastward.

“Is that a forest fire?” he said.

The mountaineer took his pipe out of his mouth, regarded the distant horizon for a time

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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in silence, then he replied slowly. "No," he said, "hit air not a forest fire."

"What is it, then?" said the Duke.

"Well, stranger," replied the mountaineer, "I call that air thing, 'The Sign.'"

Then he arose abruptly, like one who had said more than he intended, took up his rope bridle from the ground, forced the bit into the mule's mouth, and stood caressing the beast's nose, and drawing her great ears softly through his hand.



## CHAPTER XIV

### THE PLACE OF PROPHECY

THE Duke of Dorset got up slowly and stood looking out over the mountains, with his hands clasped behind him. Below the dark-green canopy of fir tops descended to a gleam of water; through the brown tree trunks the great road wound in and out; beyond that thin gleam another mountain shouldered into the one on which he stood, and the brown carpet and the verdigris canopy went again upward fantastically to the sky. When the Duke turned the mountaineer was tying up the mouth of his sack.

“My friend,” said the Duke, “this road seems to wind around the mountain. As the crow flies this distance should be less than half. Is there no short trail from the coast?”

“Yes, stranger,” replied the man, “there’s a trail laid out by the deer that hain’t so lady-like.” He made a circular gesture with his arm. “Hit runs acrost the backbone from the

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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sea. The deer didn't have no compass, but he had a purty notion of short cuts."

"Could we not take this trail down the mountain?" inquired the Duke.

The mountaineer stroked his chin, "I reckon we'd better mosey along the road to the bottom," he answered, "the trail's some botherin' to a mewel."

Something in the man's manner told the Duke that he, rather than the mule, was the object of this consideration. The man's eyes rested on his light tweeds, doubtless thought unfitted to the thicket. The Duke was taken with the fancy to push his suggestion a little.

"If you were alone," he said, "would you not follow this trail?"

The mountaineer was embarrassed. The courtesy at his heart was right, but the trick of phrasing it was crude. He was a man accustomed to move, like the forces of Nature, on a line, and he could not easily diverge from it.

"Well," he said, "if I was in a powerful hurry, I reckon I'd let Jezebel take her chance on this air trail." Then a memory seized him

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## *The Place of Prophecy*

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and his face lightened, "But, I axed you, stranger, an' you said you warn't in no sich powerful hurry."

The Duke's impression was established, but his objection was also conclusively met. He returned smiling with the clumsy diplomat and Jezebel to the great road.

All the long, hazy afternoon they descended the mountain, on the brown, noiseless carpet, stretched between its walls of green dashed with scarlet. For the most part the men traveled steadily in silence, as the pioneer and the Indian travel always in the wilderness. Now and then, the mountaineer pointed out something of interest; an eagle rising in circles from some green abyss. He named the eagle with a certain scorn; he was a robber like Barabbas. The fishhawk that he plundered was a better man, for he got his bread in toil fairly, as the *Good Book* said it. What a man earned by his own labor he had a right to, but beyond that there was God to settle with. The Duke sought to turn the conversation on this sentence, as on a hinge, to Childers. He felt, that behind the

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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first expressions of this man concerning the American, something definite and threatening moved, but he got little. It was not that Childers had great possessions, it was a sort of Divine treason that he was guilty of. He had "set up shop agin God Almighty!" Childers was old, almost alone—all of his kin had gone before him through the door of death. No one of his blood remained, except an orphaned niece, to sit after him in his place. Jehovah had held back his hand many years, but His wrath would only be the more terrible when that hand descended.

The man spoke gently, softly and in pity, like one who foresaw, but could not prevent a doom already on its way. Had there been passion or any touch of bitterness in the man's speech it would have passed over the Duke of Dorset, but coming thus it moved strangely with the impulse bringing him westward over four thousand miles of sea. That impulse lifted into a premonition. Something, then, threatened this girl whose face remained in his memory. He had come at some call! He was seized with a

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## *The Place of Prophecy*

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strange query. Did he know this danger, and the man walking beside him, have only the premonition of it; or did this man know it, and he have that premonition?

The Duke became curious to know if any fact underlay this man's shadowy forebodings. He sounded for it through the long afternoon, but he could touch nothing. The mountaineer seemed curiously timid, hesitating like a child that could not be brought to say what was turning in his mind, lest he should not be able to explain it. The man and everything moving about him deeply puzzled the Duke of Dorset. Hour after hour he studied him as they swung down the mountain, always on that noiseless carpet. The man seemed like an old, gentle child, and yet, a certain dignity, and a certain matrix of elements, strong, primal, savage, sat like a shadow behind that child. The Duke felt that the expression of the man's face was not permanent, that the child might on occasion fade out and another occupy the foreground. But not easily; that expression sat bedded in a great peace, as though fixed in plaster. If this thing

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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was the result of struggle it surpassed, indeed, the taking of a city.

Related, somehow, to this fancy, one slight detail of the man's dress caught the Duke's attention. It was a thick, conical, lead bullet strung through the middle on a buckskin string that was looped around the woolen brace above the trousers button. The bullet was as big as that of the old English Snyder, and would easily weigh five hundred grains. It was snubbed off at the end and ridged at the base with concentric rings cut into the lead. The Duke's interest lifted into a query.

"What sort of bullet is that?" he said.

The mountaineer ran his big thumb over the deep ridges. "Hit's a Minie ball," he answered.

The Duke was certain that some history attached to this piece of lead. "May I inquire," he said, "where you got it?"

The man's face relaxed into a smile. "Well, stranger," he answered, "I shot that air ball into a man onct when I was a young feller, an' then I cut it out of him."

The smile, the gentle, drawling tone, clashed



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## *The Place of Prophecy*

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with the brutal inference. The Duke probed for the story, and with difficulty he got it, in fragments, in detached detail, in its own barbaric color. Not because the man wished to tell it, but because, under the Duke's skillful handling, he was somehow not able to prevent it. It was a Homeric fragment, with the great, bloody, smoking war between the 'American States for a background. A story, big with passion, savage, virile, hot with life.

A Northern general was marching desperately across the South. With money he had hired a native out of the mountains to conduct him. The man was a neighbor to this circuit rider, one who knew the wilderness as the bear knew it. In terror, the authorities of the State had sent a messenger to this youthful hermit priest, bidding him stop the renegade before he got down from his cabin to the Federal camp, and, without a word, the circuit rider had taken down his rifle from the wooden pegs, and gone out into the wilderness. From that morning, gray, chill, three hours before the dawn, the story was a thing savage and hideous. At day-

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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break the circuit rider, leaning on his rifle, two hundred yards from the other's cabin, called him to the door, explained what he had come to do, and gave him an hour of grace. Within that hour, the renegade—a man, too, courageous and desperate—fired his cabin, and walked with his rifle over his shoulder, across his little clearing, into the opposite border of the forest. Then for three endless days and nights, they hunted each other through this wilderness, now one, and now the other, escaping death by some incredible instinct, or some narrow, thrilling margin that left the breath of the bullet on his face. Below the Northern general waited with his army, and the militia of the State waited, too, hanging on his flanks.

Then, finally, on the morning of the fourth day at sunrise, the circuit rider, trailing his man all night, stopping behind a ledge of stone, by chance, as the sun struck down the face of the mountain, saw the other seated in the fork of a great pine, watching back over his trail for his enemy that followed. With deliberate and deadly care the circuit rider shot him. The man

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## *The Place of Prophecy*

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fell hanging across the limb, and his enemy climbed the tree and descended with the body in his arms. The bullet had struck the bone near the point of the jaw, ripped up the cheek and followed the bone around the head, under the skin to the spine. Sitting on the earth the mountaineer cut the bullet out, bandaged the wound with the rags of his shirt, and taking the man in his arms walked down the mountain into his enemies' camp; walked through it unmolested, carrying his bloody burden to the commanding officer's tent door. There he laid the man down on the ground, hideously wounded, looked the officer steadily in the face, and spoke his word of comment.

"General," he said, "heah's your renegade. He hain't as purty as he was."

The Duke of Dorset looked up at the mountain, from which they had descended. The story of that tragedy, pieced together out of these fragments, thrilled him like a Saga. He could see the army waiting below, idle in its camp, while this death struggle went silently on, in the great, smoky wilderness above it. He fol-

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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lowed, with every detail, vividly, these two desperate men, stalking one another with every trick, every cunning, every artifice. With unending patience, their eyes narrowed to slits, their ears straining, noiseless, tireless, ghastly with fatigue; eating as they crept, sleeping as they crept, mad, desperate, hideous, moving with the lust of death!

And then on some morning when the sun dozed against the mountain, when the air was soft, when the world lay silent, as under a benediction, there came down out of this wilderness, this haze, this mystery, a creature streaked with sweat, gaunt, naked, lurching as it walked, carrying a thing doubled together, that dripped blood.

At sunset they came to the bottom of the mountain, and camped there in a little forest of spruce trees, beside a river, wider and deeper than the Teith. Its bed colored dark, like the Scottish rivers, not with peat, but with a stronger pigment, leached out of roots. The great road continued along this river, but the

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## *The Place of Prophecy*

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guide explained that he would ford it here in the morning, cross the shoulder of the abutting mountain on a trail, and thus save half a day of travel. They would stop here at sundown for the night if the Duke were still agreeable to such leisure. The Duke was pleased to stop. He unpacked the mule and washed her shoulders in the river, while his companion lighted a fire and prepared the supper. The mule was fed and turned loose to crop what green things she could find. The mountaineer cooked his strips of bacon on a forked twig, held over the smoldering fire, and laid out the supper on the top of one of the Duke's good leather boxes. To men who had walked all day through the forest, in the clear air, under a sun that crept, like a tonic, subtly into the blood, the odor of this dinner, mingling with the deep pungent smells of the river and the forest, was a thing incomparably delicious.

Night swiftly descended. Pigeons winged into the tree tops. The stars came out. The pirates of the river crept through the yellow bracken, and swam boldly out on their robbing



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## *The Gilded Chair*

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raid, their quaint inky faces lifted above the shimmering water. The Duke of Dorset smoked a pipe with his companion, seated on a packing case upturned by the fire. He smoked in silence, his face relaxed and thoughtful. Long after the pipe had gone out, after the smoke had vanished, after the bowl had cooled, he sat there, unmoving, the firelight flickering on his face. Then he arose slowly, unstrapped a roll of traveling rugs, handed one to his companion, and, wrapping himself in the other, lay down by the fire.

The mountaineer carried in a heavy limb, wrenched off by the wind, thrust the ragged end of it into the fire, and sat down again to his pipe. Presently the Duke of Dorset, wrapped in his rug, seemed to sleep, breathing deeply and slowly. The mountaineer came to the end of his pipe, knocked out the ashes, returned it to his pocket, and regarded the Duke carefully for a moment. Then, he thrust his arm into the sack that lay beside him on the ground, and took out the thing that he had carried all the day with so great a care.



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## *The Place of Prophecy*

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The Duke, awakened by the crackling of the spruce limb on the fire, watched the man through his half-closed eyelids. It was a bulky packet, wrapped in a piece of deerskin. The mountaineer laid it on his knees and unrolled it carefully. Within was a huge leather-bound Bible with a great brass clasp three inches in diameter. The man spread out the deerskin on his knees so the book might not be soiled, unhooked the clasp, and, turning to a page, began to read.

His lips moved, forming the words, and his big finger traveled along the page slowly under the line. But he read silently, stopping now and then, with his face lifted as though in deep contemplation of the passage. The Duke of Dorset, dozing into sleep, wondered vaguely what portion of the Hebrew Scriptures this strange, gentle person read.

The man, as he read, as his attention passed to the subject, began unconsciously to murmur. His lips, forming the words, began unconsciously to speak them, in a voice low, drawling, almost inaudible. The Duke,

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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straining his ear, caught, now and then, a fragment.

*I will also make it a possession for the bittern, and pools of water: and I will sweep it with the besom of destruction, said the Lord of hosts. . . . The cormorant and the bittern shall possess it; the owl also and the raven shall dwell in it: and he shall stretch out upon it the line of confusion, and the stones of emptiness. . . . And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces: and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged. . . . And owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there.*

The Duke of Dorset fell asleep with that picture fading into his dreams; the man's massive gentle face banked in shadow; the light, pouring blood red over the brass clasp of the book; the big bronzed finger moving slowly on the page; and the man's voice droning in cadence with the river.

The night deepened. Soft footsteps passed closer in the forest. The pirates of the river

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## *The Place of Prophecy*

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returned stained with murder, swimming like shadows, without a sound, as under some gift of silence. The great limb became an ember. The man's voice ceased. He closed the book and returned it to its place in the bottom of the sack, arose, took up the extra rug, shook it out, and spread it carefully over the Duke of Dorset.

Then he lay down, at full length by the fire, with the wooden saddle under his head.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE VULNERABLE SPOT

THE sun was in the sky when the Duke awoke. He had slept eight hours under the narcotics of the forest. He arose and stretched his limbs. The packing cases were set in order; the fire was kindled; the mule stood close beside him, eating her breakfast. The food seemed to be bits of the yellow scone which the mountaineer had offered yesterday to the Duke. The circuit rider sat smoking by the fire; he got up uneasily, stood a moment, kneading his fingers, and moving the broken fern leaves into a heap with the edge of his boot sole. Then he spoke, hesitating and with apology:

“I guess there hain’t no breakfast. There war some yaller biscuits, but I give ’em to Jezebel.”

The Duke instantly remembered that sign laid down in the Hebrew Scriptures, by which one, observing the righteous man, traveling with

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## *The Vulnerable Spot*

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his beast, should know him. He laughed and nodded to the mule.

"The lady, by all means," he said. Then he threw back his shoulders, filled his lungs with the good pungent air, and looked up at the tree tops. He was not intending to go hungry if the forest could provide a breakfast. But the wood pigeon had departed while the Duke lay below, sleeping on his back. Only the dapper woodpecker remained, hopping about on a dead fir tree, mottled with the sun, his head cocked, looking for a place to drill.

The Duke turned from the forest to the river. The sun lay upon it; the amber water slipped by, gurgling among the reeds, in long wrinkles, over the wide shallow, to a pool studded with huge stones, where it lay for a moment sunning, in a gentle eddy. The Duke followed along the bank to the pool. Out in the dark water beyond him, under the shelter of the great bowlders, fish were moving or lay in vague outline like shadows thrown into the water. Safe here, idling in their house, acquainted with no peril save that of the otter swimming in the night,

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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or the fishhawk descending in the sun. The Duke stood for some moments looking out into the pool, then he returned to the mountaineer who sat smoking by the fire.

“Have you a stout knife?” he said.

The man arose, took a clasp knife out of his pocket, handed it to the Duke, and returned to his place against the spruce tree, and his cob pipe, glowing with a coal. The Duke went out into the forest, cut a sapling, some eight feet long, trimmed it, and pared it even at the butt. Then he cut a square trench along the sapling, from the butt upward, three inches long and a quarter inch in depth. He cut also narrow rings in the bark around the sapling over the trench. Then he went back to the mountaineer, returned the knife, and put his second query.

“Have you a bit of string?”

The man put out his hand, without a word, drew the gunny sack over to him, unraveled the coarse threads around the top of it, wet them in his mouth, rolled them between his fingers, and handed them to the Duke. Then



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## *The Vulnerable Spot*

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he flipped a hot ember deftly into his cooling pipe, and leaned back again, silently, into his place against the spruce tree.

The Duke took a little knife out of his waistcoat pocket, opened its larger blade, and set the handle of it into the trench which he had cut into the sapling, forced it firmly in, and bound it tightly with the bits of hemp. Then he went with the pole in his hand, down the bank of the river to the pool. He laid it here on the bracken and stripped to the skin. The mountaineer, pulling slowly at his pipe, bare-headed, the long gray hair straggling over his face, watched every movement of the Duke with deep and consuming interest.

When the Duke stood naked, as the first man in the Garden, he took the sapling in his teeth, lowered himself into the water, and swam with long noiseless strokes out to a great rock standing in the middle waters of the pool—a rock, flat, smooth as a table, and covered with gray lichen, as with a frost of silver. He drew himself noiselessly up out of the water, crawled along the level surface of the rock, and

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stretched himself at full length, with his face peering over the lower border of it. Then he put his right arm slowly out with the pole grasped above the middle. The lichen, heated by the sun, was warm. The light descended into the dark pool as into a vat of amber. The Duke lay stretched out in the sun, his lithe, powerful body glistening with drops of water, his left arm doubled under his chest, his right, bronzed, sinewy, the muscles set like steel, raised above the dark water.

The mountaineer watched from his place against the spruce tree, his chin lifted, his pipe, turned over on its elder stem, going out. The mule behind him, nosing the bracken for lost fragments of bread, made the only sound rising in the forest. Suddenly the Duke's arm descended; the eddy below the great rock boiled; something floundered across the deep water of the pool, a faint stain of crimson rising to the amber surface. The Duke arose, took his weapon by the end, and threw it, like a harpoon, across the pool to the bank, where it stood fixed upright in the bracken, quivering, the knife

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## *The Vulnerable Spot*

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blade glittering in the sun. Then he disappeared head first into the pool, and a moment later came ashore with a three-pound trout, gaping with a wound, two inches deep, descending behind the gills downward through the spine.

Thus the Duke got his breakfast as the savage of the Yukon gets it; as the snub-nosed oriental-eyed Indian of the Pacific Coast to this day, on occasion, gets it. And he cooked it, as the Indian cooks his salmon, grilled on a flat stone before a heap of embers.

When the feast was ended, the Duke of Dorset roped the pack to the mule, and they forded the river, wading through the black water to their middle. They pushed through a huckleberry thicket and climbed the shoulder of the mountain on an old trail, hardly to be followed; made, doubtless, by the deer and the red Indian. For two hours they climbed the mountain, laboriously, on this lost trail, and then, abruptly passing around the huge, gnarled trunk of a gigantic fir, they came out on the summit; and the Duke of Dorset stopped motionless, in

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his tracks, like a man come suddenly by some enchantment into a land of wonders.

Below him, rimmed in by mountains, rising one above the other into haze, threaded by a river, lay the work surely of those palace builders of Arabia, imprisoned in copper pots under the stamp of Solomon. Two hundred feet below him on a vast terrace stood a château of cream-colored stone, roofed with red tile; carved beautifully around the doors and windows; stretching across the whole terrace, with a huge door under an arch set in a square tower. It was faced with delicate spires, and to the left a second tower arose, circular, huge, with a flat roof, and long windows rising unevenly as on the turn of some vast stairway; then it stretched away on either side, with arches, balustrades, sweeps of bare wall, great windows set in carving and mounted with fretwork, to low square towers, flanking massively the ends.

The whole of it, in spite of its walls, its massive arches, its towers—by some touch of architectural harmony, by some trick of

grouping, by some genius moving in the hand that traced the outline of it thus fantastically against the sky—seemed a thing airy and illusive, as though raised here on the instant by some fairy magic. From the château, stretching level as a floor to the foot of the bluff on which the Duke stood, lay a square of velvet turf, framed rigidly in a white road. To the east of this court, behind the château, a park descended, sloping to the river; to the south, rigid and formal against a wall of yellow stone, long terraces lay, one below the other, each a formal garden perfect in detail to the slightest fragment of color. The first lying against the wall was severe in outline, white as though paved with quartz, flanked at either end with a square of that exquisite velvet turf and lying between were three pools floating with water flowers. Against the wall, at regular intervals, was, here and there, a marble figure standing in a niche, separated by a green sheared hedge, banking the wall to its yellow coping. The second terrace was a formal Italian garden after the ancient villas

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of the Campagna. The third, an Egyptian garden, walled with pale-green tile. And thus, varied and beautiful, the terraces descended to the valley. Whatever garden any people, laboriously, through long generations, had made in form and color beautiful to the eye, was here reproduced with minute and endless patience.

Beyond, stretching westward and to the south, were green fields, meadows, pastures, reaching to the shoulders of the mountains. Far down the valley out of these mountains the great road leading from the sea emerged, wound through the meadow land, ascended west of the terraces, from which it was separated by a wall, and entered the court through bronze gates swinging to stone pillars. These pillars were surmounted by a figure having the face and bust of a woman and the body of a monster—such a figure as the Latin sculptors have sometimes called “La Chimera.”

Eastward, the lands were forests; north, the rising lands were orchards, vineyards, formal trees, shrubs, vines. And the whole of it rimmed



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in by the far-off hazy, mysterious mountains fading into the sky line, like some blue wall of the world. It was such a thing as that jinn—slave of the lamp—might have lifted out of the baked earth of Arabia.

The mountaineer, standing beside the Duke of Dorset, broke the first silence.

“Hit air Childers agin God Almighty,” he said, “hit air all made,” and he pointed with his big finger directly down the ridge on which they stood.

The Duke, following the finger, realized that the whole thing was indeed made. The entire shoulder of the mountain, on which they now stood, had been cut down, leveled and formed into these great terraces. The face of this vast cut fell sheer below him. It was walled up almost to his feet with that yellow stone—a vast perpendicular wall festooned with vines.

The mountaineer, having spoken this word of explanation, turned back to his mule, cut the rope, and began to take down the leather boxes. The Duke remained striving to comprehend the

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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magnitude of this labor—a labor colossal and appalling. A mountain pared down, a wilderness parked, graded, landscaped, and no mark of it visible to the eye. Human cleverness, patient, tireless, had obscured here every trace of this vast labor as beautifully, as subtly, as the wilderness back yonder had adorned and hidden the road cut through her dominions to the sea. The whole estate lay before him, unreal, like the work of a magician—made by no stroke of the pick, no clatter of the hammer. Those two strange, impressive, sinister figures, mounted on the stone posts, where the road entered the court, looking out over this enchantment, were mysteriously suggestive. This scene, lying before him in the sun, was some illusion of the fancy, some mirage, some chimera.

The Duke of Dorset was awakened from this reverie by the mountaineer speaking behind him.

“I guess I’ll be a-movin’ along,” he said, “you’ll find somebody down there to pack in your traps.”

The Duke turned, thrusting his hand into his

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## *The Vulnerable Spot*

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pocket, but the hand remained there when his eyes rested on the circuit rider's face. The man's big stooping body was straight now, his features firm and composed, his head set with a certain dignity on his shoulders.

"No, stranger," he said, "me an' Jezebel works fur God Almighty, an' we don't take pay."

The Duke of Dorset did then what he would have done on the continent of Europe, in the presence of such a priest; he offered money to adorn his church, to aid his poor; but the circuit rider put back the hand.

"No," he said, "as I read hit in the Good Book, God Almighty don't ker fur gewgaws, an' the poor man hain't helped much by a dollar that he don't work fur." Then he put out his hand like one parting with an equal.

The Duke of Dorset dropped the money into his pocket, and took the big callous hand firmly in his own.

"My friend," he said, "you have guided me across the mountains from the sea, transported my luggage, and provided me with food. I am,

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therefore, in your debt. Is it quite fair to leave me under this obligation?"

The mountaineer was visibly embarrassed, his feet shifted uneasily, his face grew thoughtful.

"Well," he said, "if you feel that away about this air little lift, that me an' Jezebel give you, why, jist pass it on to the next man that you find a settin' by the road, with more'n he kin pack."

Then he shook the Duke's hand as a bear might have done, slipped the rope bridle again into the crook of his arm, and set out northward along the ridge, with the mule following at his heels and the sack swaying on his shoulder.

The Duke stood motionless watching the man until he disappeared in among the boles of the fir trees, then he turned toward the château. At the brink of the sheer wall he found a flight of steps descending, and leaving his luggage where the mountaineer had piled it, he went slowly down, hidden among the vines.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE LESSON IN MAGIC

AT the door of the château the Duke found a Japanese servant. This servant led him into a court paved with mosaic, set with palms and marbles about a fountain in which nymphs, sporting in abandon, splashed a god with water. From this court they ascended a stairway, rising in the circular tower which the Duke of Dorset had already noticed. The baluster of the stair, under the rail was a bronze frieze winding upward, of naiads, fauns, satyrs, dancing in a wood, group following group, like pictures in some story.

They stopped at the first landing and crossed a second corridor to a suite of rooms, finished in the style of Louis Quinze. The servant inquired about the Duke's luggage, got his direction and went out. The Duke walked idly through the suite; he might have been, at this hour, in Versailles. Every article about him

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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belonged there in France. The bed was surely that of some departed Louis, standing on a dais, brocade curtains, drawn together at the top under a gilt crown. In this bedchamber he crossed unconsciously to the window, and remained looking out at the park descending to the river, and the mountains dreamy and beautiful beyond.

He wondered vaguely what it was that had led him over four thousand miles of sea, across a continent to this place. Did he come following the will-o'-the-wisp of a fabled legend? Did he come obeying some prenatal instinct? Did he come moved by an impulse long ago predestined?

The query, now that he stood before it, was fantastic. These, surely, were not the things that moved him. They were things merely that clouded and obscured the real impulse hiding within him. Some huge controlling emotion, dominating him, moved behind the pretense of this extravaganza; an emotion primal and common to all men born since Adam; a thing skilled in disguises, taking on the form



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## *The Lesson in Magic*

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of other and lesser motives, so that men clear-headed and practical, men hardened with a certain age, men dealing only with the realities of life, sat down with it unaware, as the patriarch sat down with angels. The wisdom of Nature moving with every trick, every lure, every artifice, to the end that life may not perish from the earth!

The Duke of Dorset turned from the window. He did not realize what this emotion was, but he felt its presence, and for the first time in his life the man had a sense of panic, like one who suddenly finds his senses tricked and his judgment unreliable. He walked across the bedchamber into the dressing room.

He found his luggage already in the room. The servant asked for the keys, the Duke gave him all but the key to the box containing the rifle that he had now no need to open. To a query, the servant answered that Mr. Childers would receive him as soon as he was pleased to come down into the library. The Duke of Dorset bathed, changed his dress. and descended.

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The library was octagon in shape, carpeted with an Eastern rug, set with a great table, lined with books, and lighted with long casement windows.

Cyrus Childers was standing at one of the windows. He came forward and welcomed the Duke of Dorset.

"I am sorry," he said, "that Caroline is not here. She and the Marchesa Soderrelli are in the East yet, but they will arrive in a day or two."

He stepped over to a table and fumbled with a pile of letters. But his eyes did not follow his hands. They traveled over his guest, over his tanned face, over his broad shoulders, and as he looked, he spoke on: he regretted the Duke's long tramp across the mountains; the closed lodge at the harbor; the negligence of Caroline. He deplored the great inconveniences which the Duke had undergone.

"The Marchesa Soderrelli said that you were coming to Canada," he continued, "and I endeavored to locate you there, but I fear that I did not sufficiently persist in my effort, because

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the Marchesa assured me that you would certainly let us know when you arrived on the Pacific Coast. You see, I trusted to the wisdom of the Marchesa."

Then he laughed in his big voice. "Ah," he said, "there is a woman! A remarkable woman. Did you know her before your coming to the bay of Oban?"

"I had that honor," replied the Duke.

"She said in Biarritz that you would likely be there. Your fame was going about just then in Biarritz."

"Rumor," the Duke answered, "has, I believe, dealt kindly with me."

The old man laughed again.

"With me," he said, "it is always the other way about."

He followed the remark with a few words of explanation. The Duke must manage to amuse himself until the others arrived. He would find books, horses, if he cared to ride, and excellent shooting in the river bottoms.

After luncheon Cyrus Childers rode with his guest over the cultivated portion of the estate,

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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through the meadows, the pasture fields, the orchards, and everywhere the duke found only Japanese at work. He remarked on this:

“How do these men get on with other workmen?” he said.

The old man stopped his horse. “I solved that difficulty before it reached me,” he answered. “I have no race problem, because I have only one race. I wanted a homogeneous servant body that would remain on the estate, work in harmony, and adjust its own difficulties. The Japanese met these requirements, so I took the Japanese. But I made no mistake. I did not take them to supplement white labor. I took them wholly. There is not a servant nor a workman anywhere on the entire estate who is not of this race.”

“You have, then, a Japanese colony?” said the Duke.

The old man extended his arm. “It is Japan,” he replied, “except for the topography of the country.”

“I have been told,” said the Duke, “that the instinct of the Japanese to found a colony con-

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stitutes the heart of the objection to him on the Pacific Coast. Other Orientals plan to return to their country; but this one, it is said, brings his country with him. I am told that they have already practically colonized certain portions of California."

"The Vaca Valley and sections of the Santa Clara Valley," replied Cyrus Childers, "contain Japanese settlements."

"And I am told," continued the Duke, "that with respect to such settlements, it is the plan of the Japanese first to drive out the other laborers, and then deliberately to ruin the orchards and vineyards, after which they more easily procure them."

"I have no trouble of that sort," said the old man, "since I pay in money for the service which I receive."

"It is strange," said the Duke, "how this sentiment against the Japanese extends with equal intensity along this coast through the American states and northward into the Dominion of Canada. One would say that these were the same people, since they are moved by the

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same influences. The riots in Vancouver seem to be facsimiles of the riots in San Francisco. When it comes to this oriental question the boundary between the two countries disappears. Our government has exerted its influence to check this sentiment, but we do not seem able to control it. Can you tell me why it is that we are unable to control it?"

"Yes," he said, "I can tell you. It is for two reasons: first, because the North American laborer wishes to suspend a law of Nature—that the one who can live on the least shall survive. The Japanese laborer can underbid him for the requirements of existence, and consequently he must supplant him. And why should he not, he is the better servant? This is the first reason. The second reason is, that the peoples of the English-speaking nations are in one of their periodic seizures of revolt against authority." And he laughed.

"The conditions maintaining a difference in men follow laws as immutable as those turning the world on its axis. Efforts at equalization are like devices to cheat gravity. Thus, the theory



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## *The Lesson in Magic*

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of rule by a universal electorate is a chimera. Men require a master as little boys in school require one. When the master goes down, terror follows until a second master emerges from the confusion. There is always back of order some one in authority. There is no distinction between the empire and republic except in a certain matter of disguises. The seizure of so-called liberty, attacking peoples, now and then, is a curious madness; a revolt against the school-master, ending always in the same fashion—disorder, riot, and a new master back at the desk. When this seizure passes, your government will again be able to control its subjects.”

“But,” said the Duke, “is there not an obligation on a government to see that its people are not underbid in the struggle for life?”

The old man’s voice arose. “What is a government?” he said.

“It is the organized authority of a whole people,” replied the Duke.

The old man laughed. “It is the pleasure of one or two powerful persons,” he said.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE STAIR OF VISIONS

THAT fantastic illusion, as of one come, after adventures, to the kingdom of some Magus, was preserved to the Duke of Dorset by the days that followed. He was for the most part wholly alone. He arose early, and lived the long day in the open; in the evening he dined with his host, and sat with him in the great library until midnight. At no other time did he see this curious old man.

He was distinctly conscious of two moods, contrary and opposite, changing with the day and night, like one going alternately into and out of the illusions of an opiate. Under the sun, in the dreamy haze of Indian summer, this beautiful château of yellow stone, set about with exquisite gardens, rimmed in the smoky distance with an amphitheater of mountains, was the handiwork of fairies, reset by enchantment from an Arabian tale. But at night,

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## *The Stair of Visions*

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in the presence of Cyrus Childers, that mood vanished, as when one passing behind the staged scenery of a play meets there the carpenter.

The days, one following like the other, were not wholly lacking in interest. The Duke of Dorset tramped about the estate, but more usually he shot quail over dogs in the river bottoms; he found this game bird smaller than the English quail, but hardy, strong winged, wild, getting up swiftly and sailing over long distances into the forest when alarmed. When the tramping tired him, he sat down under some tree by the river and watched the panting setters swim, their red coats spreading out like a golden fleece in the amber water. The servant at the château had provided him with a gun for this shooting, since he had brought with him only a rifle, and this remained in his dressing room, unopened, locked in the ordinary luggage box.

On one of these long tramps, he solved the riddle of the vague smoke pillar, rising above the mountains east of the château. He presently observed that the great road, leading from the coast over the wilderness to this country

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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place, continued through the park, eastward from the turf court, crossed the river, and ascended the mountain. He followed the road for an entire morning to the summit; there the mystery of the dark wisp of cloud was revealed to him. Far inland, beyond the crest of this mountain, that smoke arose from great mills for the manufacture of lumber. From huge stacks, dimly to be seen, a line of thin smoke climbed skyward, twining into that faint blot—that sign, marked by the superstitious mountaineer.

That night after dinner the Duke of Dorset brought the conversation to this wisp of smoke, and diverging from the query, he got a flood of light on the career of Childers. The sinister vapor was commercial incense. Great mills for the manufacturing of the forests into lumber were gathered into that valley. It was one example of this man's policy of consolidation, his rooting up of competition everywhere in trade, a detail of his plan for gathering the varied sources of wealth compactly together. The ambition of the man presented itself as he

warmed to the discussion. The motive, moving him here in this republic, was merely that moving Alexander in Asia—moving the Corsican in France. But the times had changed and the ancient plan was no longer adapted to the purpose; the seizure of authority by force was out of fashion; one must not provoke a revolt of the eye.

The Duke of Dorset, as he listened, was struck with an inconsistency. If the secret of this man's dominion lay in covering it from the eye, was not that secret out here? No Eastern despot was more magnificently housed. His host, for explanation, again pointed out that there was no native laborer on this whole estate. Every man, every woman to be seen was Japanese, brought directly over sea here to service. The whole estate inland was sentineled with keepers. Cut off thus from the republic, as though it were a foreign province, into which no man went without a passport, except, now and then, a mountaineer traveling through the forest, and, to add thus more to this isolation, the labor employed in the group

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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of industries lying east of this estate were wholly Japanese—the jetsam of the Orient.

The old man, moving on this topic, spoke with a certain hesitation, and the Duke of Dorset understood why it was; after all, like every other despot, this man craved his gilded chair; pride clamored for authority made manifest, for the pomp of sovereignty, and he had yielded to that weakness, as the Corsican, in the end, had yielded to it, magnificently, in a riot of purple. But he saw clearer than the Corsican; he was not convinced, as that other of the Titans was; he sought cover—the deeps of the wilderness for the staging of his sovereignty.

Then, as this old man sketched in detail the first big conception of his estate, the care, the mammoth labor, the incredible sums expended, pride moved him; whatever thing of beauty any people in any land had made, he had made here; whatever thing of beauty they had treasured, he had bought with money. He had commanded, like that one looking up at Babylon, myriad human fingers, backs that strained, faces that sweated. And he told the story of it,



striding through his library under its mellow light, in pride, like that barbarian king might have told the story of his city.

And in this library, beautiful as deft human fingers could make it, lighted softly from above, on its floor a treasure of India, where in colored threads an Eastern weaver had laboriously told the tale of a religion, occult and mystic, its domed ceiling covered with a canvas, painted by a Florentine, wherein the martyred dead winged upward at the last day; here—between mysteries, between, as it were, the oldest and the newest religion of the world, both disregarded, the sacred cloths of both, a spoil to profane decorative uses—the Duke of Dorset listened to this story. And, strangely, as he listened, the words of that curious priest, reading in the blood light, painfully by his fire, returned striding through his memory.

*I will also make it a possession for the bitter, and pools of water: and I will sweep it with the besom of destruction, saith the Lord of hosts. . . . And owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there.*

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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And on his way up to his bedchamber at midnight, as though that ancient prophecy moved here to some sinister fulfillment, as though the sign of it fantastically preceded, the naiads, the fauns, and those bronze figures with their leering human faces and their goat loins, forming the exquisite frieze under the rail of the great stairway, seemed to follow, trooping at his heels.

But on every night, at the bend of this stairway, as he ascended, any mood, any fancy coming with him was exorcised out of his mind and replaced by another. Here, as he turned, by a trick of the canvas cunningly hung, by a trick of obscured lights cunningly descending, a woman seemed to meet him passing on this stair, going down like one who hurried. A woman, perhaps thirty, in the fantastic costume of some princess out of an ancient story, without a jewel on her body, as though the delicate pink skin, the exquisite full throat, the purple dark hair, despised a lesser glory.

It was not merely the beauty of this wom-

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## *The Stair of Visions*

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an that stopped the Duke of Dorset coming up this stair at night, it was two fancies attending her that seized him. One that she wished to pass him swiftly, thus with her head bowed; because from some emotion held down within her, going to the very roots of life, she did not dare, she did not trust herself to look into his face. And the other that she was passing, going at this moment down the steps on which he stood, passing there at his elbow, now swiftly, out of the influence under which he held her—escaping for this life, for all time, forever. And, strangely, there attended on these two fancies a conviction, a truth established, that this woman, ten years older, was yet, somehow, Caroline Childers.

Every night as he came up the great turning staircase, he met her thus going down; and every night as he came, as his feet moved on the stair, the huge emotion, skulking within him, behind disguises, seized him and pointed to what he already desperately saw; that he could put out his hands ever so gently and she would stop; that he could speak her name ever

so softly and she would come with a cry into his arms.

The impelling, moving, overwhelming power of this illusion lay in the conviction that this moment, here on the stair, now, was final—that for this moment only, the opportunity was in his hand. The next second, ticked off by the clock, she would be gone, and something like the door of death would swing to, clicking in its lock.

Every night, when he passed on up the stairway, when his foot came to the step which followed, a sense of loss, complete and utter, like the darkness of the pit, descended on him. Loss is a word too feeble. The thing was a sense of death. Somehow the one thing, the one only thing for which he was born and suckled and ate bread and became a man—a thing, hidden until now—had, in that moment, gone, stepped out into the light, and beckoned, and he had failed it. And so, now, the reason for his being here was ended; all the care, the patience, the endless labor of Nature, bringing him in strength to the fullness of his life, was barren;

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## *The Stair of Visions*

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all the agony that he had given to his mother, the milk that he had drunk, the fruits of the earth that he had eaten, were wasted; he was now a thing of no account, useless to the great plan—a thing, to be broken up by the forces of Nature in disgust. The thing was more than a sense of death. It was a sense of extermination, merited by failure.

And further, his fathers, sleeping in the earth, seemed to approach and condemn him. The gift of life handed down to him must be passed on to another; it was a chain which, for great, mysterious, unknowable reasons, must continue, lest somehow the destiny of all was periled. Did he break it, then the labor of all was lost, the immortality of all endangered. Some doom, reaching equally to the farthest ancestor, some doom, not clear, not possible to get at, but sinister and threatening, attended the breaking of that chain. The emotion, clouding his blood, was an agent in the service of these dead men. These illusions, these fancies, were from them, doing what they could to move him. They had found one pleas-



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## *The Gilded Chair*

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ing to them, one suited, one fit; they had led him by invisible influences to that one; they had prevailed in argument against him; they had colored and obscured his reason; they had lured him over four thousand miles of sea to that one whom they, wise with the wisdom of the dead, had chosen. And he had failed them! They pressed around him, their faces ghastly.

The man, do what he liked, could not escape from the dominion of this mood. He stopped every night on the stair; he came every night with a quicker pulse, and he passed on with that sense of desolation. The Duke of Dorset called reason and common sense to his aid, but neither could exorcise this fancy. That emotion, cunning past belief, in the service of the principle of life, had got him under its hypnotic fingers! He spoke calmly with himself; he made observations, verbally correct, arguments, to the ear sound, conclusions that no logic could assail; this was only a picture, as he had been told, of Caroline's mother painted in a fancy costume; and he a sentimentalist, but they availed him nothing.



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## *The Stair of Visions*

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In the morning, when he descended, there was only the full-length portrait of a beautiful woman hanging in its frame. The illusion attending it was gone, but not wholly gone; like some fairy influence, coming to men's houses in the night, and departing to solitudes at cock-crow, it awaited him outside—in the deep places of the forest, in the high grasses by the river, in the gardens when he sat alone on the benches in the sun.

If, after three hours of shooting, he sat down at the foot of a great tree to rest, some one came and stood behind it. If, desperately, he followed some lost trail of the red Indian, twining through the mountain, at every turn of it, some one barely escaped him, and the conviction grew upon him, like a madness, that at the next turn of the trail, if he went softly forward, he would find that one. Not the serious, beautiful woman of the picture, but truant hair, whipped by the wind, eyes that danced, a mouth, sweet and young, that laughed. And drugged with the oldest opiate, the Duke of Dorset stalked the oldest illusion in the world.

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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So ridden was he by this mood that the significance of an incident, which he otherwise would have marked, escaped him. In the last few days he had met, more than once, a Japanese who did not seem to be engaged in any particular labor. He met this man always in the mountains, east of the château, coming down toward it or returning; twice the Duke had seen him late in the evening, and once at midday, lying under a tree watching the château below him.

The man cringed when the Duke called to him, and replied, in excellent English, that he was a forester engaged on the estate.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE SIGN BY THE WAY

AT noon on a certain Thursday, seven days after his arrival, the Duke of Dorset set out to shoot quail in the river bottom south of the château. A shower of rain had fallen in the morning. The air was clear and bright. The mountains gleamed as in a mirror, the haze, by some optical illusion, banked behind them. The vigor of spring, by some trick of Nature, seemed to have crept back into the earth; to swim in the dark waters of the river; to lie at the root of the grasses; to swell under the bark of the fir tree, waiting for a day or two of sun. The great principle of life, waning in the autumn, seemed moving, potent, on the point of recovering its vitality, as under some April shower. Birds fluttered in the thickets, as though seized with a nesting instinct; the cattle wandered in their pasture; new blades started green at the roots of the brown turf; and, now and then, as

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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though misled, as though tricked, a little flower opened to the sun.

The man, walking through the fields, the meadows, over the moist leaves, received, like every other thing, his share of this subtle influence. The clean air whipped his blood; that virility, warming in the grasses, in the green stem of the flower, under the bark of the fir tree, warmed, too, in every fiber of his body.

He walked on, following the high bank of the river, forgetting the red setter at his heels, the gun tucked under his arm. Quail got up and whirred to distant thickets, the woodcock arose from some corner of the swamp, but the gun remained under the cover of his arm. He felt somehow, on this afternoon, a certain sympathy with these little people of the fields—with the robin and his brown lady. Under what principle of selection had they mated? What trick of manner had favored this dapper gallant? What thing of special beauty had set this thicket belle, in his eye, above her rivals? The riddle, as he turned it, lifted to a broader application.

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## *The Sign by the Way*

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Was not that mystery a thing hidden as no other mystery moving in this world is hidden? When the King Cophetua caught up the beggar maid for queen, could he give a reason for it? Was it the blue eye that did it, or the red mouth? Other eyes were blue, other mouths, in his court, were red. Did he know any better what it was than this brown fellow in his tree top? Did one ever know? Did any living thing, since the world began its spinning, know?

Imperceptibly, creeping like some opiate, the mystery of it occupied the Duke's fancy. He returned to the picture on the stair; to the girl in Oban. What was it that his blood had caught? What thing was it that set this woman above every other in the world? Why was it that the mere memory of her voice set the nerves under his skin to tingling? Why was it that a hunger for her spread through him, as though every fiber had a mouth that starved? Had he stood up to be shot against a wall, there, in the sun, he could not have answered.

He traveled for miles south along the river,

in this autumn afternoon, idly, his gun under his arm, until the trail ended at the bend of the river, where the black waters swing about a moment, before plunging over a mile of rapids seaward through the mountains. Here the red Indian, whose trail he followed, used once to cross, swimming with a long stroke of his right arm, and holding his weapon over his head that the bowstring might be dry. A fir, uprooted by the winds, lay with its top buried in the pool, its brown body warm, mottled with the sun.

The Duke of Dorset sat down on this tree, his back against a limb. And Nature, that great enchantress, that subtle guardian of life, that divine fakir, squatting on her carpet in the sun, tempted him with pictures of vivid, intoxicating detail; whispered and suggested, stretching her lures, cunning as a spider, across the door posts of every sense. The leaves, falling on his face, were soft hands that touched him, the birds, laughing in the thickets, were a human voice that laughed, the rustle of their wings were skirts trailing on a carpet.

The day waned. The sun grew thinner



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## *The Sign by the Way*

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northward on the fields. The blue haze gathered in the pockets of the mountains, as though, like smoke, it seeped upward through the earth. A cooler air attended. An owl, sleeping in the green top of a fir tree across the river, troubled by some dream, lurched forward, lost his footing on the brown limb, awoke, and flapped, without a sound, eastward to a thicker tree top. The Duke of Dorset, sitting with the gun across his knees, caught the shadow traveling on the water, turned where he sat, and brought the gun up to his shoulder. A moment the blue barrels followed the outlaw, then his finger pressed the trigger, and that pirate had gone out no more on his robbing raids, but fate, moving to another purpose, saved him; the gun snapped; the Duke's finger instantly caught the second trigger, but that snapped, like the first, with a faint click. He brought the gun down, threw open the breech, and replaced the cartridges, but the outlaw was housed now safely in his distant tree top. The Duke of Dorset got down from his place, and turned the gun on a patch of lichen, set like a silver target against

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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a black rock emerging from the river, but the triggers clicked again.

He broke the gun and looked carefully at the shells. There was no dent on the caps, one was wholly untouched, the other scratched faintly. He opened and closed the breech slowly to observe if the cocking mechanism were defective. The resistance, the sobbing cluck of it, showed no difficulty there. Then he drew out the shells and raised the gun butt so the strikers would fall forward, but they did not fall into sight. He struck the butt with his hand to loosen these pins, if they were sticking, but they remained even with the face of the breech action. He sprung the hammers on the strikers and still they came no farther into the breech. The difficulty was obscure, the strikers were loose in their beds, the hammers working, the gun had been perfect until to-day. He began to examine the nose of the strikers, and the explanation showed on the hard steel; both had been filed off smooth with the face of the breech action. The ends of the strikers were blunt and square. He could easily see the mark of the file on each

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## *The Sign by the Way*

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one of them. The gun was useless. The discovery was so extraordinary that the man did not seek a theory to fit it. It was useless to speculate. He would inquire of the servant on his return.

The Duke followed the river to the park east of the château. Here the road crossed on a single stone span rising gracefully over the black water. A low wall, no higher than a man's knee, inclosed the road over the long arch. Beyond was the forest, changing under the descending light from blue to purple, from purple into blackness—all forest, from the bridge end to the distant tree-laced sky line. Westward the park lifted to the château—a park like those to be found in England; forest trees standing in no order, the undergrowth removed, and the earth carpeted with grass. At the summit, to be seen in among the gray tree tops, the dull yellow walls of the château loomed. The river, caught here in a narrow channel, boiled and roared, as though maddened by the insolence of that arch lifted over it for the human foot.

As the Duke approached he saw two men

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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standing in the border of the forest beyond this bridge, talking together; a moment later one crossed the bridge and climbed the park to the château. The Duke, coming up the trail, observed that this man was a footman, in the livery of the house. The other, who remained by the roadside, looking after him, was the idle Japanese. He watched the footman until he disappeared among the trees, then he turned into the forest, a moment before the Duke of Dorset came up by the corner of the bridge into the park.

The incident recalled to the Duke his previous knowledge of this Japanese and with it an explanation. The man was, doubtless, a relative of some servant in the house; the father, perhaps the uncle, of this footman, and he came here for the flotsam about a country house which the footman could dispose of. It was a custom old as the oriental servant; there was always the family to benefit by the servant's fortune, and one going between surreptitiously with his basket. The incident and the explanation of it passed through the man's mind

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## *The Sign by the Way*

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like any casual observation—as one notes and sees the reason of a hundred trivial matters, without comment, in a day.

The Duke crossed the road and turned up the hill through the park. The sun was gone now, and a hundred lights peeped through the trees, blinking from the windows of the house, as though all of its apartments were in use. At the door, as he was about to speak of the disabled gun, a valet attending brought him a message that swept so trivial an incident wholly out of his mind. Miss Childers and the party had returned. Would His Grace dress a little earlier for dinner.

The Duke of Dorset had been waiting for these words, endless day after day, and yet, now that they were spoken, he felt like one taken wholly by surprise; like one called out of his bed to face some difficult emergency, for which he needed time.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE CHAMBER OF LIGHT

CAROLINE CHILDERS came forward to welcome the Duke when he entered the drawing-room.

"I am so glad to see you," she said; "how did you ever find the way?"

"I had a very accurate map of the coast," replied the Duke.

"But how did you cross the mountains? The keeper's lodge was closed; there was no one to meet you. I am so sorry."

"On the contrary," answered the Duke, "there was a most delightful person to meet me."

"I am glad," said the girl, "but I am puzzled. Was it one of our servants?"

"I asked him that," replied the Duke, "and he said that he used the word 'servant' only in his prayers."

"Oh," said the girl, "I understand. It was a native. Then you were surely entertained."



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## *The Chamber of Light*

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"I have not been so entertained in half a lifetime," replied the Duke.

This dialogue, running before so charged a situation, seemed to the man like some sort of prelude to a drama. The moment became, for him, a vivid, luminous period. In it impressions flashed on him with the rapidity of light; details of the great drawing-room richly fitted, its Venetian mirrors, treasures of a Doge. But, more than any other thing, he saw the beauty of the girl who came up the drawing-room to meet him, who stood beside him, who spoke to him in the soft, deliberate accents of the South. He noted every detail of her, her hair, her long lashes, her exquisite mouth, her slim body, and the man's senses panted, as with a physical thirst.

But it was not these visible things, however potent, that so wholly overcame him. It was a thing for which we have no word, of which there is no material evidence, that moved from the girl, subtly, into every fiber of his body. A thing as actual and as potent as the forces moving the earth in its

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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orbit—the wild, urgent, overpowering cry of elements, torn asunder at the beginning of things, to be rejoined. The most mysterious and the most hidden impulse in the world. And it seemed to the man that in some other incarnation this woman had been a part of him, a part of every nerve, every blood drop, every fragment of his flesh; and, at the door of life, by some divine surgery, she had been dissected out of his body; and, thus, from the day that he was born, he had been looking for her; and now that she was found, every element in him cried for that lost union.

These impressions, this sudden luminous conviction, flashed on the man, while he was speaking, while he was turning with the girl toward the others; and his mind, extraordinarily clear, seemed to observe these things as somehow detached from himself. The girl was speaking, and he walked beside her, presenting a conventional aspect. They went thus, in conversation, down the long drawing-room. The Marchesa Soderrelli advanced to meet them.

“I am delighted,” she said, “to see the Duke

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## *The Chamber of Light*

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of Dorset," then she put out her hands with a charming gesture.

At this moment the Duke saw, on a table, in its oval silver frame, a picture like that one which he had seen in the yacht at Oban—that face with its insolent, aggressive look. And fear took him by the throat. The dread, the terror, which used to seize him when he passed, each night, the picture on the stairway, descended on him. This man would strike out for what he wanted while he sat here mooning in a garden. How far had the man's suit been favored? The Duke turned the query backward and forward, like a hot coal in his hand, blowing on it while it burned him.

He trembled internally with panic. Without he was composed, he spoke calmly, he lifted his face, unmoved, like one indifferent to fortune, but every mouth in him, hungry for this woman, wailed. And that emotion in the service of the principle of life, its hands hot on him, turned his eyes constantly to what his destiny was losing.

The Duke of Dorset, like every lover with

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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the taste of lotus in his mouth, saw this girl moving in a nimbus. He could not, for his life, fix her with things real. She came forth from haze, from shadow, like those fairy women drawn by painters to represent what the flesh of man eternally longs for. There clung about her that freshness, that mystery, beyond belief, alluring to the egoistic senses of a man. Evidenced by the immortality of that Arabian tale, wherein a Prince of Bagdad, cracking a roc's egg, found a woman sleeping within it, her elbow on her knee, her chin dimpling in her silk palm.

Moreover, he had found her traveling the highway of adventures. The perennial charm of romance attended her. He had gone, like fabled persons, desperately on a quest, seeking a dream woman, and had found her, a woman of this world, at the quest's end, against every probability of life. And, therefore, some authority, moving to a design inscrutable, had brought him to this woman; and therefore, by permission, by direction of that authority, she belonged to him.

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## *The Chamber of Light*

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The Duke thrilled under the proprietary word. His veins stretched with heat. Who was this man, or any man, to take what the gods, sitting in their spheres, had designed for him? All passion is essentially barbaric. Under the voices of it a man will do as his fathers did in the morning of the world, half naked in Asia. The customs, the forms of civilization may restrain him, but the impulse within him is as unchanged, after six thousand years of discipline, as fire burning in a dry tree.

That dinner the Duke of Dorset was never able to remember. The details of it passed one another into a blur. He sat down to a table beside Caroline Childers. He talked as one does conventionally at dinner. He observed the wit, the spirit of the Marchesa Soderrelli. How the host hung over her, like one charmed, how the woman had, somehow, for this night, got her beauty out of pawn! She wore a gown elaborately embroidered, her hair brightened by a jewel set here and there effectively in it, her face freshened as by a sheer determination to

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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have back for a night's uses what the years had filched from her.

They went from dinner out into the garden. The night, like that other night in the bay of Oban, was rather a sort of fairy day, except that here the world was illumined by a great yellow moon beginning to emerge from the distant tree tops, while there the sun seemed merely to have gone behind a colored window.

The Marchesa Soderrelli and Cyrus Childers remained on the first terrace beside those exquisite pools rimmed with marble. The Duke and Caroline walked on, moved by that vague wanderlust with which this mysterious dead world seems to inspire every living creature when it moves naked and golden above the earth. They descended slowly from one terrace to another along the paths of the Italian garden to the green tile wall of the Egyptian garden. The soft white light, the broad stretches of delicate shadow, and these perfect gardens, lying one below the other, enveloped the world with an atmosphere of sorcery.





"The night . . . was rather a sort of fairy day."



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## *The Chamber of Light*

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To the man this was no real land. This was some delicate, vague kingdom of illusion. It would presently vanish. There could be only an hour of it, and the value of that hour he could not measure.

It seemed to the man, walking slowly beside the girl, that he had purchased this hour at some staggering hideous cost. He must go when the hour struck, back as he had come, through the door in the hill. There was no time, no time! The object, the sole moving object of every day that he had lived, of every day that he would yet live, seemed to converge into these moments that escaped with the sound of his feet moving in this garden. How they sped away, these moments, and how big with fate they were!

Suddenly the man spoke. "Do you know," he said, "why I have come?"

"Yes," replied the girl, "I know. You came to see if the shadow of Asia were lying on a British possession."

"No," he said, "I did not come for that. The thing that made me come was the thing that

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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made my uncle go down to that dead pool on the coast of Brittany. I have done better than my uncle."

The girl replied softly, like one dealing with a memory.

"But have you done better than the stranger in the legend? Do not the peasants say that he, too, followed, sinking in the water to his knees?"

"I think," continued the man, "that he was one of us; that the thing has been always in our blood. But I think all the others failed. I think that first one of us finally went down as the second one of us went down. I think, I alone have been able to stagger across the sea."

"And to what have you come?" said the girl.

"That is the strange part of it," replied the man. "After all that hideous journey, after all that staggering through the sea, I seem to have come again, like that first one of us, to that ancient city, and, like him, to have entered into the king's palace and sat down."

The girl drew back against the green tile wall of the Egyptian garden.

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## *The Chamber of Light*

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"You make me afraid," she said.

She spread out her arms against the wall. Her eyes grew wide. Her lips trembled. She stared out over the beautiful estate, made doubly exquisite in the fantastic light.

"I have always been afraid. But how could the sea enter over this? And there is no king, and no saint."

"But there is a woman," said the Duke of Dorset, "'with hair like spun darkness, and eyes like the violet core of the night.'"

The girl gave a little cry.

The man flung up his head like one suddenly awakened. He strode across the bit of turf to where the girl stood. He caught up her hand, lying on the low cornice of the wall, and carried it to his mouth.

"Forgive me," he said, "I did not mean to frighten you—I would not for the world frighten you. I love you!"

Words old as the world; old as the first man, the first woman—old as that garden in Asia; inevitably the same since the world began its swinging, poured out over this kissed hand.



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## *The Gilded Chair*

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“I love you! I love you!” What do the expressions, the sentences, the other words that make a vehicle for these three words matter? They are nothing. These three words are the naked body. All the others are but the garments, the ornaments, the tinsel. These are the only words a woman ever hears. The others, all the others, running before them, following behind them, signifieth nothing. Whether there be wisdom in all the other words, it shall vanish away. Only “I love you” never faileth.

“I love you!” These words are of the divine logos. They are the words into whose keeping the Great Mother has confided the principle of life. They are the words at which the children of men are accustomed to surrender themselves to the will of Nature, which is the will of God. They are words, so old, so potent, so mysterious, that, like certain ancient, fabled formulas, they cannot be uttered without presenting something of their virtue. If a man say these words a woman will listen. Though he say them in jest, in mockery, yet will she listen. Though she do not believe them, though she do not love him,



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## *The Chamber of Light*

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yet will she listen, so great a virtue hath this formula of the oldest magic—this rune of the oldest sorcery.

The girl standing here against the wall of the garden listened. Her body seemed to relax and cling to the wall. For a moment she did not move. For a moment, expanded into the duration of a life, she listened to these words—these old, potent, mysterious words! These words, charged with all the ecstasy of all the men and women who have ever loved, with the destiny of future generations, with the “joy that lieth at the root of life,” poured out over her kissed hand.

For this long, potent, delirious moment the girl was merely a wisp of blossom, clinging to these tiles. Her consciousness, her will, her very identity had gone out from her. For this moment she was under the one tremendous dominating impulse of the world. For this moment she was only the eternal woman yielding herself to the eternal call.

Her eyes were wide. Her lips parted, her body relaxed, soft, plastic. Then suddenly, as

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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though they had but stood aside for the passage of some authority above them, her consciousness, her will, her identity poured back into her body. She sprang up. She escaped. She drew back into the angle of the wall. She put her hands to her face, to her hair. Then almost fiercely she thrust them out before her.

“No, no, no,” she cried. “You must not say it. I must not hear it. I have decided; and you helped me. You convinced me. Don’t you remember that afternoon in the bay of Oban? I did not know what to do. I was undecided then, and I asked you. . . . No, no; you did not understand that I was asking you—you did not understand; but I was; I was asking you and you told me. Oh, I could say every word of what you told me. You told me that older persons knew, that one’s own impulses were nothing; that one ought to obey—to obey—one’s family. Well, I have promised to obey, and I will obey. While he lives, while my uncle lives, I will obey him.”

She withdrew her hands and pressed them on her face, and on her hair. The man took a

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## *The Chamber of Light*

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step toward her, and again, with that fierce gesture, she thrust her hands out.

"Don't," she cried. "Don't, don't come to undo what you have done."

And like a flash she was gone.

She fled past him, through the garden, from one terrace to another, swiftly toward the château.

The man turned, walked along the terrace, through a little gate, and returned by the great road, across the turf court, to the library. And he walked firmly like one who has finally laid his hands on a thing that eluded him, like one who has finally found, standing defiant in some cranny of the rocks, an enemy that, until now, he could never overtake.

In her mad flight, on the highest terrace in the exquisite Italian garden, Caroline Childers came on the Marchesa Soderrelli. She was standing erect, unmoving, like one of the figures in the niches along the wall. Her face was lifted, her arms lay stiffly extended along her body. Her eyes looked out over this sea of

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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moonlight washing a shore of tree tops. There lay about her the atmosphere of some resolution that cast down the plans of life.

Behind her, as though they had put the riddle which she had answered, as though they had presented to her that eternal question, which they had presented to all the daughters of the world since that ball began its turning, those figures surmounting the stone pillars of the bronze gates, those figures having the face and bust of a woman and the body of a monster, those inscrutable chimeras, seemed in the soft light to lie content in the attitude of life.

The girl stopped when she saw the Marchesa Soderrelli. Then, with a cry, she flew to her and flung her arms around her and crushed her face against her bosom. The impulsive act awakened the woman. Her face softened; her body relaxed. She put her arm around the girl and drew her gently up against her heart.

“What is it, dear?” she said.

“Oh, Marchesa,” the girl sobbed, “I have refused—I have refused to go to the city of Dreams.”

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## *The Chamber of Light*

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The woman leaned over and kissed the girl's hair.

"My child," she said, "your uncle has just asked me to be his wife, and I have said that I would not."

When the Duke of Dorset entered the library he found it empty; but a casement window leading down to a terrace lying along the side of the château was open. He crossed to the window and looked out. There below him Cyrus Childers moved along this terrace; he was alone, and he walked with his curious, hovering motion; his arms and his hands moved; his plowshare jaw protruded. All the energy of the man seemed to have got into action. Something had prodded this energy into a deadly vigor.

The Duke of Dorset, having found the man for whom he was seeking, went back to the library table, got a cigar, lighted it, and sat down at the window. The potent characteristic of his race was strong on him. Now that a definite struggle for the thing he wanted was visible before him, he could wait. What it was needful

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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to say, he would presently say when this man was finally ready to hear him.

The old man continued to walk from one end of the terrace to the other, passing below the window. And above him the Duke of Dorset waited. An hour passed and he continued to walk. A black shadow, creeping out from his feet, skulked behind him, changing, as he moved, into fantastic shapes; now a cross when he thrust out his arms; now a creature with wings when his elbows were lifted; now a formless thing that jerked itself along. Finally, the man passing the steps by the casement window, turned and entered the library. He went over to the great table, stopped and began to select a cigar. The Duke of Dorset arose. At this moment a voice spoke to Cyrus Childers from the door.

“Uncle,” it said, “I cannot find a servant in the house.”



## CHAPTER XX

### THE MOVING SHADOW

THE presence of Caroline Childers in the door brought the Duke of Dorset forward into the room. He alone had some understanding of the incident; but for the moment he said nothing. Cyrus Childers put his hand on a bell. "Nonsense, Caroline," he said.

But the bell brought no response. He tried another. Then he turned to the Duke.

"Pardon me a moment," he said, "these bells are evidently broken." He crossed to the door, spoke to Caroline, and went with her out into the corridor.

A moment later the Marchesa entered. The Duke had remained on his feet, where he had arisen, a thin wisp of smoke clinging to the end of his cigar, as it went slowly out.

The Marchesa Soderrelli crossed straight to him.

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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"There is something wrong here," she said; "the place is deserted."

The Duke of Dorset laid the cigar down gently on an ash tray, then he smiled.

"My dear Marchesa," he said, "something has gone wrong with the bells; that is all."

"That is not all," replied the woman; "I have been through the house to my room; there is no servant anywhere."

The Duke continued to smile. "I would wager a hunter," he said, "that every man and maid of them is at this moment in the servant's hall."

He advanced a step. "Look again, my dear Marchesa," he said, "I think you will find the maids scurrying up at the end of the corridor."

The Marchesa Soderrelli looked steadily at him for a moment.

"My friend," she said, "there is evidently trouble here. Let us look this situation in the face. We are in the center of an isolated Japanese colony, and these Orientals have made some concerted, premeditated move. Do you understand what it is?"

The calm, resolute bearing of the woman

caused the Duke of Dorset to change his plan. He determined to take her into his confidence.

“I would be glad if I knew that,” he said; “I have only a conjecture.”

The Marchesa continued to regard him with undisturbed composure.

“May I inquire,” she said, “what your conjecture is?”

The Duke told her then of the idle Oriental, and what he had observed on this evening at the foot of the park. He feared that the servants had, in fact, gone; that the thing was a concerted act, planned and carried out by the whole corps of servants. The Oriental would sometimes slip away like that, leaving the very kettles on the fire. They were doubtless displeased at something, and had determined to abandon the château. This, the Duke feared, was the situation here—an awkward one, but not a thing to be alarmed over. Still, among so many servants setting off in a body, some one of them might attempt mischief; theft, fire, anything that should suggest itself. However, the very concert of their act indicated a certain order,

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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and that of itself discouraged any fear of violence. The Duke pointed out that this was merely a theory, a conjecture, which he hoped would presently prove unfounded.

The big voice of Cyrus Childers now came to them from the corridor, and, a moment later, he entered with Caroline. The muscles of the man's face were distended with rage, he controlled that passion only with the greatest effort. When he spoke, his voice came out slowly, as though held and measured.

"We seem to be abandoned by the servants," he said; "I do not understand it."

Then abruptly, as though the question had been for sometime considered, Caroline Childers spoke to the Duke of Dorset.

"Have you noticed any indication of this thing?" she said; "any warning incident?"

The Duke saw instantly that he must say here what he had just said to the Marchesa, and he told again of the Oriental, and especially of what he had seen this evening at the bridge. But he forgot again another more pointed incident of the same afternoon. He spoke with a

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## *The Moving Shadow*

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studied unconcern; he minimized the significance of the thing; it was like Eastern servants to leave in a body; it meant no more than a going without permission; the annoyance of it was the only feature to be thought of; any alarm was obviously unfounded. But his manner and his comment carried no visible effect. Caroline was evidently alarmed. Cyrus Childers added now a word in support of the Duke's conclusion—his face fallen into composure, or rather into control; there was no reason for alarm; they could all get on somehow for to-night; to-morrow he would adjust the thing. His massive jaw clamped on that closing sentence.

The Marchesa added also a further word. "They are both quite right," she said; "we shall get on very well to-night."

Caroline Childers did not at once reply. She remained looking from one person to the other.

"I wonder," she said, "why it is that we do not say what we are all thinking. It is extraordinary that the servants should all suddenly leave the house; it is more extraordinary

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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that they should leave it at the direction of this person who has been hanging about the grounds."

Then she turned to the Marchesa.

"Neither my uncle nor the Duke of Dorset are in the least misled, neither are you, nor am I. Let us not pretend to one another; we do not know what may happen. Nothing, or the very worst thing."

The Marchesa did not reply, and in the meantime Cyrus Childers answered for her.

"Nonsense, Caroline," he said, "you are unduly excited."

"I am not excited at all," replied the girl.

Her eyes came back to the Duke of Dorset.

"Do you agree with my uncle—shall we wait until morning?"

The Duke met this situation with something approaching genius.

"By no means," he said; "the ground ought to be at once reconnoitered. I will follow the deserters a little."

He was smiling, and his voice under the words laughed. But within, the man did not



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## *The Moving Shadow*

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smile, and he did not laugh. He was oppressed by certain foreboding memories.

The host at once protested. The thing was absurd, unnecessary.

But the Duke continued to smile.

"I beg you to permit it," he said. "Here is a beautiful adventure. I would not miss it for the world."

The old man understood then, and he laughed. "Very well," he said, "will you have a horse and weapons?"

"I will take the horse," replied the Duke, "but not the weapons, thank you. In the meantime, I must dress for the part."

He went swiftly out of the library and up to his room. Here he got into his riding clothes.

At the foot of the stairway, as he came down, he found Caroline Childers waiting for him. The two walked from the château door along the turf court to the stable. The place was lighted as the Duke had first observed it on this evening, but it was now wholly deserted and silent. Caroline Childers pointed out the way and the Duke found a horse, led him out, and

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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girted on a saddle. The horse was a big red sorrel, smooth as silk, sixteen hands high, and supple as a leopard. The Duke measured the stirrup leather on his arm, and let it out to the last buckle hole. Then he turned to the girl beside him, his voice running on that amused, mock-dramatic note.

"If I do not return in half an hour," he said, "you will know that I am taken."

Then he gathered up the reins, swung into the saddle, and rode out of the court eastward into the park.

Caroline Childers returned slowly across the court to the terrace above the gardens. The night was soft and warm. From the gardens, one lying below the other, came the trickling of water.

Meanwhile the Duke of Dorset rode slowly among the trees down toward the stone bridge over the river. But the facetious mood, which he had assumed to cover the wisdom of this scouting, had departed from him, and something of the sense of loss that used to await him at

night, passing the picture on the stairway, replaced it. This consuming mood entered in and possessed the man, and signs which he should have seen, marking events on the way, escaped him.

He came presently to the stone bridge over the river. The horse refused, for a moment, to go on it. He struck it over the withers with his crop, and forced it to go on. The horse swerved, plunged, and half over the arch, tried to turn back. The Duke swung it around with a powerful wrench of the bit. The horse went instantly on his hind legs into the air, striking out with his fore feet.

That rearing saved the man's life. As the horse arose, some one fired from the cover of the woods beyond the bridge—a dull heavy report like that of an old-time musket. The horse, struck in the chest between the shoulders, hung a moment in the air, then it fell forward stumbling to its knees in the road. The Duke slipped out of the saddle and rolled to the side of the bridge where the low wall hid him. The horse got slowly up, and stood with

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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its head down and its legs far apart, trembling, wet with sweat; the blood poured out of the wound in its chest, in a stream that flowed slowly into a big, claret-colored pool, and then broke and trickled across the road in a thin line to where the Duke lay, soaking his coat. The horse stood for some minutes unsteadily, thus, on its feet; then it began to stagger, the breath whistling through its distended nostrils. In this staggering it nearly trod on the man, and, to escape that danger, he began to crawl along the bridge close to the wall.

Presently he reached the abutment and slipped from the shelter of the wall into the wood of the park. Here he ascended the long hill to the château, keeping in the shadow of the trees, moving slowly and with caution. When he came to the last tree, at the summit of the park, he stopped and looked back.

No one followed that he could see. The horse still staggered, bleeding, over the white floor of the bridge, now to one side of it and now to the other; then, as he looked, the beast's knees struck violently against the low

wall where he had just been lying, it lurched forward, lost its balance, toppled and fell with a scream, crashing through a tree top into the river below.

The word is not accurate. A horse in the extremity of terror utters a cry like no other sound heard upon this earth. It is a great, hideous shudder, made vocal. Then, as though that cry had called them into life, the Duke saw figures emerging from the wood beyond the bridge. He stepped out into the light, walked swiftly along the court and into the door of the château.

There, in the library out of which he had just gone, a strange scene awaited him. The curtains had been pulled over the windows and the lights were all out except a single one above the big table in the center of the room. On this table lay a dozen different weapons, hunting and target rifles, duck and bird guns, and a variety of pistols. The Marchesa Soderrelli stood over this table, piles of cartridges in little heaps before her on the polished mahogany board. The others were not anywhere to be seen.

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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The Marchesa started when the door opened. "Thank God!" she said; "they missed you. I heard the shot. I thought you were killed."

"They got the horse," said the Duke.

Then a memory seized him and he crossed to the table, took up one of the rifles, threw open the breech, and passed his finger over the firing pin. He tossed the weapon back onto the table and tried another, and still another.

The Marchesa explained: "I have every gun in the house; two or three of the rifles will do, and the pistols are all good."

The Duke took up one of the pistols, sprung the hammer, broke it and felt the breech plate with his thumb. Then he laid it on the table.

"These weapons," he said, "are all quite useless."

The Marchesa Soderrelli did not understand.

"They may not be of the best," she said, "but they will shoot."

"I fear not," replied the Duke.

Then he told swiftly, in a few words, of his experience with the shotgun on this afternoon; threw open the breech of the rifles and pointed



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## *The Moving Shadow*

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out the filed-off firing pin in each. Every weapon, to the last one, had been made thus wholly useless.

The woman's face became the color of plaster, but it remained unmoving, as though every nerve in it were cut.

"I could bear it," she said, "if we had any chance; if we could make a fight of it."

"I think we can do that," replied the Duke; "I have a hunting rifle among my luggage, packed with its ammunition in an ordinary box. That box has not been opened, and I think its contents not suspected. I will see."

And he went swiftly out of the room.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE IMPOTENT SPELL

THE Duke of Dorset hurried through the deserted corridor and ascended the great stair.

From the moon, sheets of light, entering through the long windows, lay here and there, white, across the steps, and red across that bronze frieze wherein satyrs danced. Although the man hurried, habit for an instant stopped him in the arc of light at the turn of the stair. He lifted his eyes to see that woman, in her costume of old time, descending, but the illusion of it was gone. The thing was now only a lifeless picture hanging in its frame—a sheet of painted canvas from which no disturbing influences emerged. For the fraction of a second surprise held him, then the sound of some one moving in the corridor above caught his ear. Some one walked there, was come now to the stairway, was descending. And the next moment Caroline Childers, coming hur-

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## *The Impotent Spell*

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riedly down, saw the Duke of Dorset standing on the step by the window. She stopped instantly, and, like one in terror, put up her hands to her face, her fingers wandering into her hair.

“Oh!” she said, “you are hurt! There is blood!”

The man was standing in the light; his sleeve, soaked from the wounded horse, was visibly red.

The girl came slowly to another step, her fingers still moving in her hair; her speech fragments.

“They shot you . . . I heard it . . . I knew they would. . . . Are you killed?”

The Duke remembered now this blood on his coat and hurried to explain it.

“I am not hurt,” he said. “They killed the horse. I am not in the least hurt.”

The girl thrust back her hair with a curious deliberate gesture. Her head moved a little forward. Her bosom lifted. She came down slowly from one step to another. The moment of stress seemed to have matured her face. She was now not unlike the woman whom he had met every night on the turn of the stair.

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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The Duke saw this, and all that had been illusion, fancy, a state of the mind, emerged into reality. Not on the instant, but in gradual sequence, like one coming in broad day upon events approaching as he had seen them in a dream. It is a moment rare in the experience of life, when the situation dreamed of begins to arrive, in order, in the sun. And especially when these foreseen events appear to demand a decision which one must on the instant hazard. Here was the opportunity, coming in life, which had presented itself so many times to this man in fancy. Then the foreseen march of events, as is usual in life, wholly altered.

The long sheet of glass in the window by the Duke's elbow broke with a sharp sound, shivered to fragments, rattled on the step, and a stone struck the rail of the stairway.

The Duke sprang to the window and looked out. A little group of figures was gathering along the northern border of the court; one, who had come closer to the château, was now running back to them. The Duke turned to find Caroline Childers looking, with him, through

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## *The Impotent Spell*

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the window. He did not stop to explain what she could see; he gave her a brief direction, and vanished up the stairway.

“Find your uncle. Have all wait for me in the library. I will come in a moment.”

He ran down the corridor to his room, dragged a leather box out into the floor, unlocked it and took out the gun and ammunition which he had packed there at Doune. He examined the breech of the gun a moment with suffocating interest. It had not been touched, doubtless because the box seemed an ordinary piece of luggage, and he had kept the key to it. He put the gun barrel swiftly into its stock, filled his pockets with cartridges, and returned, running, to the library.

There he found a certain order which he had not hoped for. Cyrus Childers, who had gone to look at the situation for himself, had returned. He had restored the lights, thrown a rug over the useless weapons on the table, and was talking calmly to the others when the Duke entered. He looked up, saw what the Duke carried, and shook his head.

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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"We must put away these guns," he said, "there is no need of them. We must be careful not to provoke violence. I am going out to talk to these people. Let us not lose our heads."

It was certain that the man's quiet, masterful seizure of the situation had cleared the air. The Duke saw this and hesitated to make an issue.

"I agree with you," he said, "shooting is the last thing to be done, but one ought to take every precaution."

The old man frowned, lifting the muscles of his mouth. "If a man has a gun ready," he said, "he is apt to use it."

The Duke smiled. "I think you can trust me there."

The old man was not convinced, but he formally agreed.

"Very well," he said, "keep the gun out of sight. I am going out now."

Cyrus Childers went over to another table, got a cigar, deliberately bit off the end, lighted it, pulled a soft hat over his head and went out.



The Duke followed behind him, but at the door, under the light, he stopped a moment, and put a clip of cartridges into the Mannlicher. The Marchesa Soderrelli and Caroline Childers remained in the library. In the corridor confused sounds, coming from outside, were audible, and another window in the stairway broke. The old man gave these things no visible attention; he neither lagged nor hurried. A few minutes before he had closed the door of the château; he stopped now, drew the bolts, and threw it open. Then he stepped up into the full light of the door, and stood looking calmly out. The Duke, bare-headed, stepped up beside him, holding the rifle with one hand behind his back.

Outside a crowd of figures, scattered over the court, drew together and advanced toward the door. It was possible, under so bright a moon, to observe these persons distinctly, and the Duke of Dorset was not reassured by what he saw. They were the scum of Japan; a mob such as the devil, selecting at his leisure, might have put together—dirty, uncouth, a considerable mob, reinforced every moment by others

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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entering the northern border of the court in little groups of perhaps half a dozen. The ones nearest to the château were servants, but foresters were beginning to arrive, equally sinister, equally repulsive to the eye. The mob, drawing together by a common instinct, stopped about fifty paces from the door, hesitated and chattered. At the distance the Duke could not catch the words, but he recognized the language in which they were uttered.

Cyrus Childers spoke then to the Duke beside him.

"I am going out to talk to these people," he said. "Please remain here."

He spoke without turning his face. Then he stepped down into the court and walked as he had walked through the corridor, deliberately, with unconcern, out to the mob waiting in the middle of the court. The voices died down and ceased as he approached. The moving figures stopped on their feet. The old man walked on until he came up close to the mob; then he took the cigar out of his mouth and began to speak. At the distance the Duke could not hear what

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## *The Impotent Spell*

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he said; he seemed to address certain individuals and, now and then, to put a question.

Thé Duke stood gripping the stock of his rifle, expecting the man to be attacked. But instead the mob seemed brought to reason; it was wholly silent and, the Duke thought, wholly motionless. The old man talked for perhaps five minutes. Then he put his cigar back into his mouth, made a gesture with his hand like a speaker dismissing an audience, turned and began to walk back leisurely to the château. He had covered perhaps half the distance, when a single voice crashed out of this mob, loud, harsh, grating.

At the cry the mob surged forward as at a signal. The Duke of Dorset brought the rifle from behind him, like a flash, to his shoulder. He saw the mob hang a moment on its toes. He heard in several dialects shouted assurance that the gun was harmless. Then, hoping to drive the mob back by the exposure of its error, he fired close over it, so the whistle of the bullets could be heard. But the whole mass was already on the way. It rushed, hurling a

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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shower of missiles. The Duke, struck violently, was thrown back against the door; he heard a scattering popping, as of twigs snapping in a fire, and a clattering of stones against the wall.

Then he got on his feet and understood what had happened. The mob had charged, believing the gun useless; had discovered the error on the way, and was now running for cover to the stables. A stake, thrown by some gigantic arm, had struck across the gun barrel, which he had involuntarily raised to protect his body, and the violent impact of the blow had carried him against the door. His fire had failed to check the rush of the mob in time. It had passed over the old man before it broke. He lay out there on the trampled turf, one arm doubled under him.

The Duke thrust a clip of cartridges into the Mannlicher and stepped out into the court. But no man, in the crowd scurrying to cover, turned. They vanished like rats into a wall. The Duke crossed the court, reached the body of the old man, took it up, and began to return with it to the house. Then, from somewhere

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## *The Impotent Spell*

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about the stables, that irregular popping began. The Duke saw, or thought he saw, a hand holding a pistol thrust out from the partly open door of a horse stall. He stopped, put down the body, swung the muzzle of the Mannlicher on the spot and fired; a fragment of the door as big as a man's hand detached itself and flew into splinters. The popping instantly ceased, and the Duke went on into the château, unmolested, with his burden.

He laid the body down on the floor, closed and bolted the doors of the château, then he stooped down to examine the body. The old man seemed quite dead, but he could not at once locate the injury. He felt over the body; he looked for blood; then he put his hand under the head and the whole of the occipital bone, at the base of the skull, was soft to the touch. The man had been killed instantly by a stone or the blow of a club.

When he looked up from this examination, both Caroline Childers and the Marchesa Soderrelli were standing beside him. The girl was pressing her hands together, and jerking



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## *The Gilded Chair*

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them in and out against her bosom. But she was not speaking a word. The face of the Marchesa retained its unmoving aspect of plaster.

The Duke arose and spoke to the Marchesa.

“Why did you not keep her in the library? I feared this might happen.”

“They are coming that way, too,” she answered, “up the hill from the river.”

“How many?”

“I don’t know. Hundreds! I don’t know.”

The Duke stepped swiftly to the door and looked out through one of the side windows. Groups of figures were hurrying into the service portion of the house. He turned quickly from the window and started down the corridor toward that end of the château. He had not gone a dozen steps when he stopped. Smoke met him!

It had been presently clear to the Duke of Dorset that the little party ought somehow to get out of the château. He could not hold it against this rising, especially when led by servants familiar with every door and window. He might hold a detached tower of it, or a cer-



tain passage. But to make such a stand was to put all into a corner, with every way out presently cut off. Against mere assault, such a plan was to be considered, but now, against fire, it was wholly out of the question. Moreover, no time was to be lost. The service portion of the house had already been entered and the park leading to the river occupied. The only directions offering a safe exit were on the road south, leading down through the meadow land, westward to the coast, or directly across the court, up the stone steps into the mountain. This latter seemed the better way out. But to cross the court from the door was not to be thought of; the little party would be instantly seen, and an open target over every step of the way.

The Duke returned to the window by the door. Caroline Childers was on her knees by the body of the old man, the tears were streaming down her face. The Marchesa Soderrelli walked up and down with a short nervous stride. When the Duke looked through the window, he saw instantly a way out. The wall bordering

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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the formal gardens ran from the south wing of the château along the court; they could cross, behind the cover of that, to where the road entered. There the distance to the stone steps was short, and once on these steps the vines would screen them, and they might go unobserved into the mountain.

But this way remained only for that moment open. The vines moved and the Duke saw, indistinctly, a man standing at the bottom of these steps. He watched a moment to see if others came that way, but no others followed. The man remained alone, watching the château through the heavy border of vines. This evidently was a sentinel, and a plan, on the instant, suggested itself to the Duke of Dorset. He broke a corner out of the window with the muzzle of the rifle, thrust the barrel through, and brought the gun to his shoulder. Then a thing happened, by chance, and to the eye trivial. A black beetle, sleeping there against the sash, aroused by the breaking glass, crept over from its place onto the gun barrel; the Duke put out his hand to brush the creature out of

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## *The Impotent Spell*

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the line of sight, but the beetle ran along the barrel to the muzzle. The Duke slipped the gun back under his arm and brushed the insect off. But he had no longer time to remain at the window.

A crashing sound, as of a door rammed with a heavy timber, echoed through the corridor.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE IRON POT

THE Duke turned instantly.

“This way,” he said, “through the house to the garden.”

At the word the Marchesa caught Caroline Childers by the arm, and hurried with her through the corridor; the Duke followed. They crossed the south wing of the château; through picture galleries; through corridors, beautified by innumerable human fingers, hung with paintings worth the taxes of a province, decked with bits of wood, bits of ivory, cut curiously by masters who sat over that one work for a lifetime.

Finally they came to a last drawing-room, opening from the south tower of the château into the Italian garden. Its west windows, hung with curtains, looked out over the turf court. They hurried through this chamber out onto the terrace, and from there halfway along the

wall of the Italian garden, running here beside the south border of the court.

The situation south of the château was curiously puzzling. The gardens, lying in terraces, one below the other, had not been entered; the road, too, running south was clear. But beyond the gardens, in the meadow land to which the road descended, tiny groups of figures moved out from the river as though stretching a cordon that way, westward toward the mountains. But no group advanced, from this direction, toward the château. The situation gave a minute's respite.

The Duke of Dorset, in that respite, again considered the avenues of escape, and that way up the mountain, under cover of the vines, seemed the only one remaining. The mob was evidently advancing wholly from the east; spreading from the stone bridge on the north, through the park, and on the south, through the meadows. The mountain, due west, was perhaps clear, except for the one man whom the Duke had just discovered among the vines. If that man were out of the way, then,

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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doubtless, the whole of the steps to the top would be open. The man could not be seen from the garden, but he could be seen from the west windows of the drawing-room through which they had just passed. Moreover, the shot would better be fired from there so that the report of the rifle would indicate that they were still in the château. The Duke explained the plan in a dozen words. The Marchesa Soderrelli understood at once and assented.

The Duke knew that little time remained to him. At any moment those entering the house on the north might come out into this garden. He ran to the drawing-room, entered it, and crossed quickly to a window looking out over the turf court. He drew aside the curtain, and stepped in behind it with his rifle. But he came now on the heels of chance. The heavy vines at the foot of the stairway moved. The lighter tendrils above were shaking. The man, whom he had come to kill, was going up the stone steps hidden by the leaves.

There was no moment to be lost, and the Duke immediately returned to the garden.



The situation east of the château had changed. Not only was that curious cordon, stretching from the river southwest to the meadows, drawing nearer, but a body of several hundred was coming up the great road, leading to the court west of the gardens.

He stood for a moment on the terrace before the door; his body rigid, the rifle in his hand. He knew what this advance meant. The end of this business was approaching. The play hurried to its last act—a single moment of desperate fighting in some corner of the wall. He saw with what patience, with what order, events had gathered to this end. The time wasted in that fatal parley before the door; the moment lost at the window; the escape of that one among the vines; this advance now on the south road. Events, all moving to a single, deadly purpose, as under the direction of some intelligence, infinite and malicious.

The thing looked like a sentence of death deliberately ordered; and the man took it for such a sentence, but he took it in no spirit

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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of submission. He took it as a desperate challenge; before he died he would kill every man that he could kill, and he would do it with care, with patience, with caution.

Caroline Childers, and the Marchesa Soderrelli remained where they had been standing by the wall. The Duke, on the terrace before the door, saw that the steps up the face of the mountain was the only route not now visibly hopeless. He had seen but one man there; doubtless there were others, but there was a chance against it, and he determined to take that chance.

'At this moment a crowd of figures poured out into the road from the shelter of the wall running parallel with the gardens. They swarmed onto the open road before the stone pillars. Then they saw the two women, and they swept with a babel of cries across the garden. The Duke was about an equal distance away from the Marchesa and Caroline Childers when he saw the rush start. He was strong; hard as oak. Every nerve, every muscle in him lifted instantly to its highest tension. It was

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## *The Iron Pot*

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a breathless race, but the man whose body had been trained, disciplined, made fit by the perils of the wilderness, won it. He was on the gravel beside them, with the mob forty paces to come. He had perhaps thirty seconds remaining to him, and each one of them was worth a life, but he took the time to say: "Don't move."

Then a thing happened that would convince any student of warfare of the utter futility of the bayonet as against the modern rifle at close range. Within twenty seconds the Duke emptied the magazine of the Mannlicher four times into the mob—a shot for every second. And yet the man did not fire with a mere convulsive working of the trigger. He shot with a precise, deadly, catlike swiftness, choosing and killing his man like one driving the point of a knife with accuracy into a dozen different spots on a table before him. The momentum of the massed rush carried the mob almost to his feet before it fell back and scattered into the garden, and yet the Duke never clubbed his rifle. The one man who almost reached him, who fell

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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against his feet, was shot through the head, or rather the whole top of his head was removed by the expanding bullet of the Mannlicher.

The conduct of women in the presence of violent death has usually been imagined, and they stand thus charged with a coma, a hysteria, that observation does not justify. The testimony of those who observed the English women during the Mutiny, who marked the carts passing through the streets of Paris under the Terror, is to the contrary. When the Duke swung around with the rifle in his hand the two women were close beside him; they had neither moved nor uttered a sound. He indicated the mountain with a gesture, and the three of them ran along the wall, beside the dead bodies, across the road, and over the dozen yards of green turf to the stone steps.

He saw that no minute was to be wasted. The crowd advancing on the road was now running, and the mob, scattered by the fire, would remain only for a moment in confusion. He ran with the rifle held ready in his hand, his finger on the trigger guard. But the precau-

tion was unnecessarily taken. The stone stairway at its foot was wholly clear. They began to ascend it, the Duke going first, with the muzzle of the rifle presented before him.

It is doubtful if any man ever accurately anticipated a coming event, even when that event was beginning to appear on the sky line. The man whom the Duke had seen was not on these steps; the way was clear to the top. Here was a change of status as complete and swift as any related of the fairy. The three persons, come now to the top of this stairway, stood above and outside the zone of death, within the shelter of the forest. Below, the scene was wholly unreal and fantastic. It was not possible to believe that all the savage, bestial, primitive passions of the Oriental swarmed here to a work of ruin; that the beast was in control of this place of exquisite beauty; that the cordon of civilization had been forced here at its most perfect quarter.

For a moment the scene held the Duke as a thing staged under his eye in some elaborate drama. Then groups of figures began to emerge



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## *The Gilded Chair*

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from the doors of the château and a thin line of scarlet crept along the whole face of the north wing under the roof—flames licking the wooden cornice. He realized, then, that he and the two women had not escaped; that they would be hunted through these mountains; that the struggle would be one of extermination; that he faced a condition as primitive as any obtaining in the morning of the world.

He stepped back, tucked the rifle under his arm, and looked about for the trail leading down to the river and the great road. He found it in a moment and began to descend, followed by the two women. The three figures hurried, a curious moving picture in the moonlit forest. The Duke of Dorset, bare-headed, forcing his way through the brush of the mountain, a rifle in his hand; the Marchesa Soderrelli in a trailing, elaborately embroidered evening dress, the skirt of it tearing at every step; Caroline Childers with bare arms, bare shoulders, her white gown fouled by the leaves—all on their way to the wilderness. So swiftly had conditions been reversed.



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## *The Iron Pot*

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Finally they came to the river at the point where the Duke had crossed on his way to the château. Here not only was the current swift, but the water was up to a man's waist. That meant to the shoulders of the women, and consequently too deep to ford. He did not stop to discuss the crossing, but set out along the bank of the river in the hope of finding a shallow. This bank, unlike the opposite one, was dense with underbrush. The two women followed close behind the man's shoulders in order to escape the bushes that he thrust aside. Sometimes they touched him, crowded against him, stumbled against him. Caroline Childers was more fortunate than the Marchesa Soderrelli. Her dinner dress had no train. The older woman's long, heavy skirt caught in every bush, sometimes she was thrown down by it, sometimes it tore. Finally she stopped, reached back to the skirt band, gave it a jerk that wrenched off the delicate hooks, and when the garment fell about her feet, stepped out of it. Under it was a black-satin petticoat. She went on, leaving the skirt lying in the trail.

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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It was the first toll taken of civilization by the wild.

The bank continued for several hundred yards, thus, through thickets, then it became a forest, clear of undergrowth, but close set with trees, and dark. A forest that grew thicker and consequently darker as they advanced. There was now scarcely any light. Here and there a vagrant ray descended through some opening in the tree tops, or a patch lay, like a detached fragment, on the boles of the trees.

The Duke watched the river as they advanced, but for perhaps half a mile he found no favorable change in the swift current. Finally the bank ascended to a heavily wooded knoll; below it the river pounded over bowlders. But above, there was evidently a shallow, where the sheet of water glided at no great depth over a rock bed. They stopped on this knoll, among the trees in the dark; the bank was clear of any brush, and dry, covered with a rug of moss, browned by the autumn sun, and yielding like velvet to the foot. The river glistened in the white moonlight, black, viscous, sinister, slip-

ping through the forest. The road, lying beyond it, was also in the light, while the mountains, stretching off westward from this road, lay under a vast inky shadow.

The Duke of Dorset took off his coat, laid it at the foot of a tree, set the rifle beside it, bade the women await his return, and went down the bank into the river. He found the water not deeper than he had judged it, but the current was rather stronger, and the rock bed uneven and seamed with cracks. He crossed to the opposite bank and was returning, when something dropped into the river beside him with a slight splash. He looked up and behind him.

The road, white here under the moon, stretched up the river gradually into shadow. From the direction of the *château*, a man was advancing, running in a long, slouching trot. The Duke remembered that the river, like the road, was in light. He stooped, hooked his fingers into a crack of the rock bed, and lowered himself into the water. He remained thus with the water pouring over him until a second splash advised him

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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that the man had gone on. He got slowly to one knee, and in a moment to his feet. The road was now clear. The Duke hurriedly waded to the bank and came to the shelter of the trees. It was dark under the trees, but he could make out the figure of a woman sitting by the tree where he had placed the rifle, and a second figure, vaguely white, standing at the edge of the bank against a fir trunk. He spoke to this standing figure.

"Where did the man go?" he said. "I could not see from the river."

"He followed the road," replied the figure; "can we cross?"

The Duke looked out at the moon. It stood high in the heavens, bright and clear, a disk of silver. Behind it the sky was clean and swept, but to the eastward, traveling slowly up, were a company of clouds, one flying like a wild goose behind the other.

"We can cross," he answered, "but not until the moon is hidden. There may be others on the road."

Then he sat down on the dry moss.

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## *The Iron Pot*

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Immediately the figure by the tree moved toward him. He noticed that it was but half white, as it stood, and now, as it drew nearer, it became wholly white. The explanation followed, his coat was put around his shoulders. He got up at once.

"No, no," he said, "please keep it on; I am not cold."

"But you are wet," replied Caroline Childers, "and you will be cold." Then she added, as though to settle the discussion, "I put the coat on because the cartridges were in the pocket. I have the rifle."

And she held out the Mannlicher.

The Duke hesitated. Then he put the coat on and took the gun out of her hand. The girl remained where she was standing.

A question came into the man's mouth, but he closed his lips on it, and dropped the butt of the rifle on the moss beside him. A swift comprehensive understanding came to him. A picture arose strikingly before him: the mob arriving on the road, he in the river there, and this white figure, wearing his coat, fighting with

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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a rifle from behind a fir tree, like the first resolute women of this republic, holding the log house against the savage. She had flung the bits of stone into the river to warn him, and had taken up the rifle to defend him.

“Sit down,” he said; “we shall doubtless have a long distance to walk.”

The girl sat down where she stood. The man remained a moment leaning on the muzzle of the rifle, then he, too, sat down, placing the gun across his knees.

It was that hour when the wilderness is silent; before the creatures that hunt at day-break have gone out; before the temperature of the night changes; when the solitary places of the world seem to wait as with a reverential stillness for the descending of some presence—the hour when the discipline of life is lax, and the human mind will turn from every plan, every need of life, however urgent, to any emotion that may enter.

The Duke of Dorset did not move. The desperate and crying difficulties that beset him became gradually remote. He could not take the



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## *The Iron Pot*

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road to the coast as he had hoped; he dared not cross the river under this moon. And every moment here was one of almost immediate peril. They had been quickly followed on the road. They would be as quickly followed down the mountain. These things were impending and real, but they seemed, in this silence, remote and unreal. The man sat in contentment, like one drawing at a pipe of opium; a peace, a serenity like that of the night entered into him; a thing for which we have no word; something strange, mysterious, wonderful, drew near—was at hand—a thing that was, somehow, the moving impulse of life, the object of it, the focus into which drew every act running back to the day that he was born.

A certain vast importance seemed now to attend him. The horror and turbulence of this night had been benefits to him. Events, ruthless to others, kind to him. Some god, bloody and old, savage and cruel, but somehow loving him, had stamped out the world for his benefit, and left him sitting among the wreck of it, with the one thing he wanted. It could not

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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escape from him; he had only to put out his hand.

An hour passed. The world still lay silent. The very dead fringe clinging to the fir limbs were motionless; the dull, monotonous sound of the river, rolling in its bed, was a sort of silence. Brief periods of darkness now covered the river and the road as the moon entered the company of clouds. No one of the three persons moved. The white figure so near to the Duke of Dorset might have been wholly an illusion of the sense. The wet clothes on the man's body dried. Another hour passed. Then faint cries, hardly to be distinguished, descended from the mountain behind them. The man arose and listened, he now heard the sounds distinctly; he heard also a second sound carrying through the forest.

Some one was coming along the river bank, through the undergrowth, a mile away.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE GREAT PERIL

THE remote sounds, caught by the man's trained ear, were now audible to the women. They arose. The Marchesa Soderrelli moved over to where the Duke stood looking up at the sky.

"They are coming," she said.

The man did not answer, and he did not move. The sounds, carried down to them on the night air, grew louder. The Marchesa became impatient.

"We must go on," she said.

The words, the tone of the woman's voice, were urgent. But the Duke remained with his face lifted to the tree tops. Presently, he turned swiftly and handed the rifle to Caroline Childers.

"We must try it now," he said, "while the moon is under that cloud. Each of you give me your hand."

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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The two women instantly obeyed, and the three persons went hurriedly down the bank into the river. The whole world was now dark. The man thus entered the water, between the two women; he held each by the wrist, his arms extended. It was the only way to cross the river swiftly, and to be certain that neither woman was carried away by the current. Caroline Childers was above with the rifle. The Marchesa Soderrelli was below. The wisdom of the Duke's plan was at once apparent. Neither of the women could have kept her footing without his aid; thus held, they managed to reach the middle of the river, and would doubtless have crossed without accident had the rock bed continued smooth. But there is to be found in the beds of rivers, especially when seamed with cracks, a species of green slimy fungus, clinging to these cracks, and streaming out below, slippery, like wisps of coarse hair boiled in soap.

As they approached the opposite shore, the Marchesa trod on one of these bits of fungus and fell. The current, at that point,

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## *The Great Peril*

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was swift, but the water was shallow. Her knee struck heavily on the rock. The Duke held her, but she seemed unable to get again to her feet; her body swung out with the current; the river was intensely dark. Fortunately, in the shallow water, Caroline Childers managed to get ashore without the Duke's assistance; and having now his other arm free, he was able to lift the Marchesa, and carry her out of the river. He did not stop on the bank; he went on across the road, and into the wood beyond, still carrying the Marchesa Soderrelli. Caroline Childers followed with the rifle.

The wood, skirting the foot of the mountains, was here less densely packed than on the other side of the river. The Duke wished to cross it into the deeps of the forest before the moon emerged. He walked with tremendous strides in spite of his burden and in spite of the darkness. The ground under foot was open, and he was able to cross the strip of wood to the foot of the mountain before the moon came out. He stopped and put the woman down. There was a little light entering among the trees, al-

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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though neither the road nor the river could be seen.

The Marchesa was not able to determine the extent of her injuries. The blow had been on the left knee; she did not think that any bone was broken, nevertheless, the joint gave way when she tried to get up. The three persons fully realized the alarming extent of this misfortune. Still no one spoke of it. Caroline Childers wanted to stop here, but the Duke insisted that they go on. He put his arm around the Marchesa, and she tried to walk. But she presently gave it up and sat down. Caroline Childers now insisted that they should stop; perhaps the Marchesa might be able to walk when the knee was rested. The Duke refused. He pointed out that the leg, if not broken, would presently be stiff, and more painful than it now was; that they were still so close to the road that beaters would easily find them; that the rising clouds indicated rain; and that the mountain would be infinitely harder to climb if the moss and leaves were wet. Moreover, he could not determine the lie of the mountains



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## *The Great Peril*

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from this valley, and he wished to be high enough to locate directions when the dawn arrived.

He announced his intention to carry the disabled woman. The Marchesa protested. The Duke simply paid no attention. He took her up, and set out through the mountains. The forest grew more dense; the ascent became more difficult; still the man went on without slacking his pace. Sometimes he paused to rest, holding the woman on his knee; sometimes he put her down while he tried to discover the lie of the mountain. But he refused to stop, and always he continued to advance.

Usage, training, the rigor of discipline long followed toughen and strengthen the human body to an excellence past belief. This man carried the woman, hour after hour, up the mountain, through the fir forest, and he traveled quite as fast with his unwieldy burden as the girl behind him was able to do with no weight except that of the rifle. The night lengthened and darkened. The morning began to approach. Still black tree trunk followed black

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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tree trunk, and the brown moss carpet under their feet stretched upward. The air, instead of cooling with the dawn, became warmer. A thin mist of rain began to fall. Presently the contour of the ground changed; the carpet became level; more light entered among the trees, and they came out into a bit of open.

It was now morning. They came into an ancient clearing; a patch once cut out by some pioneer's ax; the scar of an old wound, that the wilderness had taken from the invader. The blackened stumps still stood about, fragments of charred tree tops remained; and in the center of the clearing stood a log cabin, roofed with clapboards, its door fallen from its wooden hinges, its chimney, built of crossed sticks, daubed between with clay, tumbled down, but the hewn logs and the clapboards, split with the grain of the wood, remained.

The Duke crossed the bit of open and entered the cabin. It was dry, and covered with leaves carried in through the door by the wind. The three persons were scarcely under the protection of this shelter, when the threatening rain

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## *The Great Peril*

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began to fall. It was one of those rains common to the coast line. There was no wind; the atmosphere seemed to form itself into a drenching mist that descended through the trees.

The Marchesa Soderrelli complained of pain in the injured knee, and the two women determined to improvise a bandage. The Duke arose and went out into the clearing. The forest was beginning to steam, and he wished, if possible, to get the lie of the mountain range before they were hemmed in with mist. The two women improvised a bandage from a petticoat ruffle, and bound the knee as tightly as they could. They did not talk; both were greatly fatigued, and both realized the desperate situation. They did not discuss it, but each prepared to meet it, in her own manner, with resolution.

When the Duke had got the points of the compass, he was not disturbed about what ought to be done. He knew that as soon as the two women were a bit rested, they should at once go on. It would be a day of fatigue and hunger; but no one of them would die of hunger in a day, and by night he hoped to come in sight of the

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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coast. Then they could stop and meet the problem of food.

He was going back into the cabin to explain the necessities of this plan, when the Marchesa Soderrelli called him. He entered. Caroline Childers was standing, leaning against the logs by the tumbled-in fireplace; the Marchesa Soderrelli sat on the ground among the leaves; both, in physical aspect, had paid their tribute to the wilderness. The girl's hair and eyes seemed to dominate her face; the soft indiscriminate things, common to youth, were gone; she had become, in the eight hours departed, a woman, acquainted with the bitterness of life, and facing its renunciations. The Marchesa Soderrelli, sitting on the floor of the abandoned cabin, was an old woman, her face flabby, her body fallen into baggy lines. But the spirit in her was unshaken, and her voice was compact and decisive.

"I wish to speak to you, my friend," she said; "won't you please sit down?"

The man looked from one woman to the other and sat down on the corner of a log, jutting out

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## *The Great Peril*

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from the door wall. For the last half of this night, he had been, upon one point, content. He was like one who, desiring a thing above all others, and despairing of his ability to obtain it, finds that thing seized upon by a horde of brutal and hideous events and thrust into his arms. He stood now, past the outposts of uncertainty, with the possession in his hand.

Those under the oldest superstition in the world warn us that such a moment is above all others perilous. That it is the habit of Destiny to wait with fatal patience until one's life swims over this mark, and then, rising, like a whaler to drive in the iron.

The Marchesa Soderrelli continued, like one who has a final and difficult thing to say.

"My friend," she began, "I am a woman, and consequently you must expect me to go round about in what I have to say, and you must forgive me when I seem unreasonable."

She lifted her hands and put back her hair.

"I have no religion, as that word is generally defined, but I have a theory of life. I got it out of a book when I was little. In that book

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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the disciples of a wise man came to him and said: 'Master, we can endure no longer being bound to this body, giving it food and drink, and resting it and cleansing it, and going about to court one man after another for its sake. Is not death no evil? Let us depart to whence we came.' And he answered them: 'Doth it smoke in the chamber? If it is not very much I will stay. If too much, I will go out; for remember this always, and hold fast to it that the door is open.' Well, the smoke has come to be intolerable."

She moved in the leaves.

"I have tested my fortune again and again as that wise man said one ought to do. There can be no longer any doubt. It is time for me to go."

The woman looked from the man to the girl standing by the chimney. Her eyes were appealing.

"You must forgive me," she said, "but you must believe me, and you must try to understand me. I want you and Caroline to go on."

She put up her hand.



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## *The Great Peril*

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"No, please hear me to the end of it. I know how the proposal looks to you. It seems cruel. But is it? I am come to the door, and I am going out through it. Is it not more cruel to force me to put my own hand to the latch?"

The woman paused. She sat huddled together in the leaves; there was something old, fated, irrevocable in the pose of her figure.

"I beg of you," she added, "as my friends, to spare me that."

The mist streaming up from the soaked forest lay in the cabin. It gathered about the woman on the floor. Presently she went on:

"I am afraid that I cannot make you see how completely I am done with life, but I will try. So long as one has a thing to love, or a thing to do in this world, the desire to remain here is a strong and moving impulse in him. But when these two things go, that desire also goes. And the loss of it is the sign—the beck to the door. That old wise man made it very clear, I think. He said: 'Another hath made the play, and not thee, and hath given thee thy lines to speak, and thou art not concerned, except to

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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Speak them well, and at the end of them to go. . . . And why shouldst thou wish to remain after that, until He, who conducts the play, shall come and thrust thee off? ”

“Now,” she continued, “I have come to the end of my lines. They have not always been very pleasant lines. But I have contrived to speak them with a sort of courage. And I would not now be shamed before the Manager.”

She peered through the thickening mist, as through a smoke, straining her eyes to see the face of the man by the door, the girl by the chimney; but she could not, and she tried a further argument.

“You must be fair to me,” she said, “look at the situation. I cannot go on, that is certain, and for the two of you to remain here, on my account, is to charge me with your death. Dear me! I have enough on the debit side of the ledger without that.”

The woman’s head oscillated on her shoulders. Her right hand wrung the fingers of her left. She considered for a moment, her chin fallen on her bosom. Then she sat up, like one

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## *The Great Peril*

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under the impulse of some final and desperate hazard.

"I am going to ask each of you a question," she said, "and I entreat you, as one in the presence of death, to answer the truth. And let it be a test between us."

Then she leaned forward, straining through the mist, to the Duke of Dorset.

"My friend," she said, "can you think of any interest in this life that you would like to follow; any plan that you would like to carry out; any hope that you would like to realize? because I cannot, and if you can, it is I, and not you who should remain here."

There was absolute silence. The wet mist continued to enter, to obscure, to separate each of the three persons. The man did not reply, and the Marchesa swung around toward the dim figure of the girl, standing by the ruined chimney. The leaves crackled under the woman's body. She rested on her hand.

"Caroline," she said, "a man may have many interests in life, but we do not. With us all roads lead through the heart. Now, if you

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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have any affection for any living man, you must go on. I make it the test before God. If you have, you must go. If you have not, you may remain. But I have the right to the truth—the right of one about to decide who shall live and who shall not live.”

The man at the door arose slowly to his feet, as under the pressure of a knife, breaking the skin between his shoulders. Every fiber in him trembled. Every muscle in his body stood out. Every pore sweated. The shadow of the descending iron was black on him.

But if this question disturbed Caroline Childers, there was now no evidence of it. She replied at once, without pause, without equivocation.

“I shall remain with you,” she said.

The Marchesa Soderrelli, sitting on the floor among the leaves, bit her lip, until the blood flowed under her teeth.

The man, standing by the door, did not move. The mist mercifully hid him; it packed itself into the cabin. The three persons changed into gray indefinite figures, into mere outlines, into

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## *The Great Peril*

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nothing. The mist became a sort of darkness. It became also a dense, tangible thing, like cotton-wool, that obscured and deadened sound.

Something presently entered the clearing from the forest, tramped about in it, and finally approached the door.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE TASTE OF DEATH

THERE is no phenomenon of weather so swiftly variable as that of mist. It may lie at a given moment on the sea or on the mountain—a clinging, opaque mass, as dense and impenetrable as darkness; darkness, in fact, leeches of its pigment, a strange, hideous, unnatural, pale darkness—and the next moment it may be swept clean away by the wind. This is especially true on high altitudes; the ridges of hills; the exposed shoulders of mountains, where the fog lies clear in the path of the wind. On Western mountain ranges, adjacent to the sea, this protean virtue of the weather is sometimes a thing as instantaneous as sorcery. The soft rain is often followed by a stiff, heady breeze, sucked in landward from the ocean. This breeze travels like a broom sweeping its track. Thus, the Marchesa Soderrelli, wrapped in this mist, like a toy in wool, sitting on the floor of the



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## *The Taste of Death*

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cabin, believed herself present at some enchantment, when suddenly the mist departed, a cool wind blew in on her, and the sun entered.

She uttered a cry of astonishment, and pointed to the door. A huge, gaunt mule stood directly before the cabin, and almost instantly the tall figure of a man, equally gaunt, loomed in the door.

"Good mornin'," he said, with an awkward, shy bob of the chin. His eyes were gentle; his craggy, rugged feature placid like those of some old child. "I had a right smart trouble to find you."

The tragic nature of a situation is an intangible essence purely mental. It does not lie in any physical aspect; it is a state of the mind. Let that state of the mind change, and the whole atmosphere of the situation changes. The scene may stand in every detail precisely as it was, the actors in it remain the same, Nature and every phase of Nature the same, and yet everything is changed. It is a state of the mind! On the instant, the scene of breaking tension staged in this mountain cabin descended

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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into commonplace. Life, and the promise of life travel always in one zone; death, and the threat of death in another—but shifting imperceptibly, and on the tick of the clock.

One arriving now at this cabin would have marked only signs of fatigue in the aspect of the three persons in it. Of this fatigue, the girl and the older woman gave much less evidence than the man. He seemed wholly exhausted. The vitality of the two women arose with the advent of the mountaineer. They gave interest and aid to his efforts to provide a meager breakfast. He produced from a sack across the mule's saddle a piece of raw bacon, flour and a frying pan.

The Duke of Dorset, after his first welcome to the mountaineer, and his brief explanation to the others, had returned to his seat on the log by the door. He seemed too tired even to follow events. The mountaineer had produced sulphur matches from the inside of his hat—the only dry spot about him—wrapped in a piece of red oilcloth, cut doubtless from the cover of some cabin table. He was now on his knees by

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the tumbled-in chimney, lighting a fire. Caroline Childers, with the knife, which the Duke had once borrowed, was cutting the bacon into strips. The Marchesa Soderrelli, still seated on the floor, was in conversation with the mountaineer, her strong, resolute nature recovering its poise.

The contrast between the degrees of fatigue manifest in the two women and the man by the door was striking. He looked like a human body from which all the energies of life had been removed. In the case of the two women, Nature was beginning to recover. But, in the aspect of the man, there was no indication that she ever intended to make the effort.

Now, as the effect of mere exertion, this result was excessive. The man was hardy and powerful; he was young; he was accustomed to fatigue. Eight hours of stress would not have brought such a frame to exhaustion. Eight days would hardly have done it. Moreover, within the last hour, the man had entered the clearing with no marked evidence of fatigue. The transformation carried the as-

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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pect of sorcery, or that of some obscure and hideous plague, traveling in the mist.

Occult and unknowable, swift and potent are the states of the mind. The blasting liquors, fabled of the Borgia, were not more toxic than certain ones brewed, on occasion, in the vats of the brain.

The Marchesa Soderrelli took over the conduct of affairs. She brought now to the promise of life that same resolution and directness which she had summoned to confront the advent of death. She spoke from her place on the floor, her voice compact and decisive. She estimated with accurate perspective the difficulties at hand, and those likely to arise. Now as determined to go on as she had been a little earlier determined to remain. Her conversation, almost wholly to the mountaineer, was concise, deliberate and to the point. But while she talked directly to him, she looked almost continually at the Duke of Dorset. She seemed to carry on, side by side, two distinct mental processes—one meeting the exigencies of the situation, and the other involving

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## *The Taste of Death*

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a study of the man seated by the door—and to handle each separately as a thing apart from the other.

The coast could be reached by trails known to the mountaineer in eight or nine hours, perhaps in less time. If they set out at once they would arrive in the afternoon. Nevertheless, the Marchesa Soderrelli, coming to a decision on the two problems before her, declared that they should remain where they were until midday. It is possible that she considered the Duke of Dorset too fatigued to go on; but she gave no reason.

This careful scrutiny of the changed aspect of the man by the door was not confined to the Marchesa Soderrelli. The circuit rider observed it, considered the man's physical needs, and agreed to the delay. Caroline Childers, behind the Marchesa Soderrelli, sitting by the bit of fire, her hands around her knees, also studied the man; but she did not regard him steadily. She sat for the most part, looking into the fire at the cooling embers, at the white ash gathering on the twigs. Now and then, fitfully, at in-



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tervals, her eyes turned toward him. The expression of the girl's face changed at such a time. It lifted always with concern and a certain distress, and it fell again, above the fire, into a cast of vague, apparently idle speculation; but, unlike the scrutiny of the other woman, it continued.

The Marchesa having reached a conclusion turned about and began to probe the mountaineer with queries. She wished to know where he had been, how he had come to follow, and by what means he had found them.

The old man was not easily drawn into a story. The history of the night came up under the Marchesa's searching hand in detached fragments. Fragments that amazed and fixed her interest. This story failed to hold the girl's exclusive interest, although absorbing that of the Marchesa. Her eyes traveled continually to the Duke of Dorset while she listened to it as though placing each incident in its proper relation to him. As though each incident, so coupled up, entered in and became a part of some big and overpowering conception that her



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## *The Taste of Death*

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mind again and again attempted to take hold of. She seemed, unlike the older woman, not able to carry the two things side by side in her mind. She swung from the one abruptly to the other.

The mountaineer, under the searching queries of the Marchesa, was disturbed and apologetic. He had been slow to find the party, he thought; and, as preface to the story, meekly issued his excuse, including a word for the mule.

“Jezebel’s a-gittin’ on, an’ I hain’t as spry as I was.”

Not as spry as he was! The traveling of this man for the last half of the night would have appalled a timber wolf. He had beat the mountains, on both sides of the river, for four hours, running through the forest. He had gone along the face of the mountains for at least five miles, backward and forward, parallel with the great road, traveling faster than that wolf. He was desolated, too, because “God Almighty” had sent him in haste, like that man of God out of Judah, and he had stopped “to eat bread and to drink water.”

Stopped to eat bread and to drink water!

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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For eight hours the man had not stopped except to feed the mule. For ten hours he had not eaten a mouthful, and had drank only when he waded through a river. Why, since he carried food, he had not eaten, the Marchesa Soderrelli, with all her dredging, could not get at. The man seemed to have had some vague idea that the food would be needed, and an accounting of it required of him. He was distressed for what the mule had eaten, but one must be merciful to his beast, for the Bible said it.

Moreover, he had been "afeard."

Afeard! The man had been all night in the immediate presence of death. He had stood unmoved and observing under the very loom of it. He had crossed again and again under its extended arm, under its descending hand; within a twinkling of the eye, a ticking of the clock of death.

It ought to be remembered that the Marchesa Soderrelli was an experienced and educated woman, skilled in the subtleties of speech, and in deft probing. And yet, with all the arts and tricks of it, she was not clearly able to discover

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## *The Taste of Death*

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wherein the mountaineer accused himself of fear.

It seemed that the man, following a definite impulse which he believed to be a direction of God, had arrived on the spur of the mountain above the château before the revolt was on. But here in the deeps of the forest he had stopped to consider what he ought to do, and in this he had been "afeard," not for his life, but to trust God. He should have gone on into the château, then he might have brought all safely away. But he had "taken thought."

When he heard the cracking of the rifle, he had tied the mule to a tree, and descended the stone steps. But he arrived there after the attack was ended. Concealed by the vines, he had concluded that the occupants of the château were already gone out on the road to the coast.

He had returned for the mule, made a detour around to the road, and advanced toward the château. But he found no one. The château was in flames. He now thought that if any of its occupants had escaped, they would be in the

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mountain from which he had descended, and would come down the trail to the river. He had, therefore, traveled with the mule as fast as he could to that place on the road. But no one had come over the river there. He could tell that, because one, coming up out of the water, would have made wet tracks on the dry moss of the bank, and the dry carpet of the road.

Now, extremely puzzled, he had hidden the mule in the forest, and set out to see if the escaping persons had crossed the road farther on. He had traveled for several miles, but had found no wet track on the dry road. Then he had crossed the river and followed up on the opposite bank. He had hunted that face of the mountain before the pursuing mob. Finally ascending the bank of the river, he had come by chance on the Marchesa's skirt. This had given him a clew to the direction taken by the party, and following it he had finally located, by the trodden moss, the place where the river had been crossed. He had waded the river there, hoping to follow the wet tracks, but the rain had now begun to descend, and he could not tell

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what direction they had taken. He had returned for the mule, and followed the road to the summit of the mountain. Here he again tied the mule in the woods and began that long, tireless searching, backward and forward along the whole face of the mountain.

Finally, in despair, he returned to the mule, and as he put it, "left the thing to Jezebel an' God Almighty." And the mule, doubtless remembering, in the uncomfortable rain, the shelter of the abandoned cabin, had gone along the backbone of the mountain into the clearing. And so he had found them.

But to the circuit rider it was God's work; the angel of the Lord in the night, in the impenetrable mist, walking by the beast's bridle. He was depressed and penitent. He had been one of little faith, one of that perverse and headstrong generation; afraid, like the Assyrian, to trust God. And so, in spite of him, they had been found.

The man was so evidently distressed that the Marchesa Soderrelli hastened to reassure him. She told him how the Duke of Dorset had gone

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twice to a window to kill him. She thought the deep religious nature of the man would see here a providential intervention—the hand of Yahveh thrust out for the preservation of His servant. But in this she was mistaken. He had been in the presence, not of God's mercy, but of His anger. The hand had been reached out, not to preserve, but to dash him into pieces. He believed in the austere God of the ancient Scriptures, who visited the wavering servant with punishments immediate and ruthless; the arrow drawn at a venture and the edge of the sword.

The astonishment of the Marchesa Soderrelli at the man did not equal his astonishment at her. He sat looking at the woman in wonder. How could she doubt a thing so clear? Was not the Bible crowded with the lesson? Presently he arose and went out into the clearing. The gaunt mule was cropping vines in the open before the door. He paused to caress her lovingly with his hands. Then he crossed the clearing and disappeared into the forest. The Marchesa concluded that the man had gone to



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post himself somewhere as a sentinel, and she composed herself to wait.

The morning was drawing on to midday. The sun lay warm on the forest. The soft haze stretched a blue mist through the hollows of the mountains. The peace, the stillness, the serenity of autumn lay through the cabin. The air was soft. No one in the cabin moved. Caroline Childers sat where she had been, fallen apparently into some vague and listless dreaming. Her hands wandered idly among the leaves, breaking a twig to bits, making now and then a foolish, irrelevant gesture. The Duke sat with his elbow on his knee, and his chin resting in the hollow of his hand. The girl, now and then, looked up at him and then back again to her aimless fingers crumbling the leaves.

A droning as of bees outside arose. It seemed in the intense stillness, to increase, to take on volume. The sound deepened. It became like the far-off humming of a wheel under the foot of a spinner. It drew the attention of the Marchesa Soderrelli. She began to listen intently.

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“Do you hear that sound, Caroline?” she said, “what is it?”

The girl arose and listened. She went noiselessly to the door, and out into the clearing. She came to the mule, stopped, and began, like the old mountaineer, to stroke its big, kindly face. A breath of wind carried the sound to her from the forest. It was a human voice, rising and falling in a deep muttering cadence.

*“I’ve been in the presence of Thy wrath, O God Almighty, an’ the j’intz of my knees are loosened. I hain’t like David, the son of Jesse. Uit’s Thy hand, O Lord, that skeers me. Preserve me from Thy sword, an’ I’ll take my chancet with the sword of mine enemies. Fur I’m afeard of Thee, but I hain’t afeard of them.”*

The girl stood a moment, her hand under the mule’s muzzle, then she walked slowly back to the cabin. At the door she stopped and answered the Marchesa’s question.

“It’s the wind,” she said, “in the tops of the fir trees.”

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE WANDERING

AT noon they set out through the mountains, the Marchesa Soderrelli riding the mule, the old man leading with the rope bridle over his arm, and the sack swinging on his shoulder. Caroline Childers walked beside the mountaineer. The Duke followed with the rifle. The world had changed; it was now a land of sun, of peace, of vast unending stillness. The carpet of the wilderness was dry; the dark-green tops of the fir trees brightened as with acid; the far-off stretch of forest, fresh, as though wiped with a cloth; the air like lotus.

The old man traveled along the backbone of the mountain, not as the crow flies, to the coast, but in the great arc of a circle swinging to the west. He thus avoided abrupt and perilous descents and the dense undergrowth of the hollows. The forest along these summits was open. Cyrus Childers had cleaned them of their fallen

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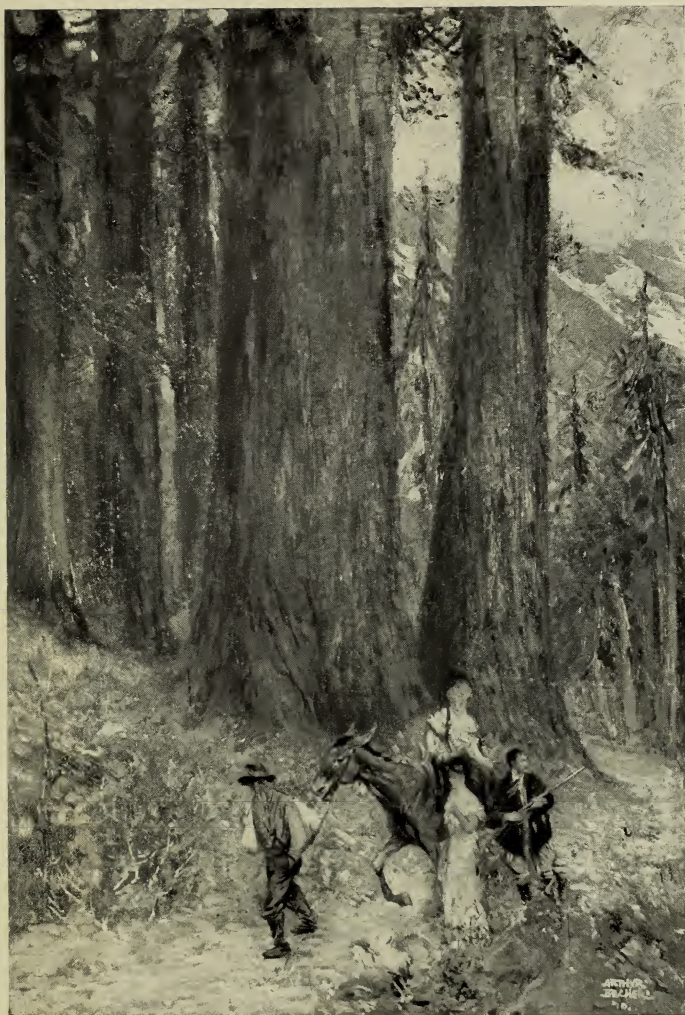
## *The Gilded Chair*

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timber. They were now great groves of fir trees, shooting up their brown bodies into the sky, and stretching there a green, unending trellis through which the sunlight filtered.

The little party, traveling in these silent places, through this ancient wilderness, would have fitted into the morning of the world. The gigantic old man, the lank, huge mule, and the woman riding on the pack saddle might have come up in some patriarchal decade out of Asia. The girl, straight, slim, lithe and beautiful as a naiad, her cloudy black hair banked around her face, belonged in sacred groves—in ancient sequestered places—one of those alluring, mysterious, fairy women of which the fable in every tongue remains. Called by innumerable sounds in the mouths of men, but seen thus always in the eye of the mind when those sounds are uttered. The Marchesa Soderrelli was right, on that day in Oban, when she set youth first among the gifts of the gods. It is the beautiful physical mystery that allures the senses of men. And youth, be it said, is the essence of that sorcery.





“Great groves of fir trees . . . through which the sunlight filtered.”





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## *The Wandering*

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The Duke of Dorset came, too, with fitness into the picture; he was the moving, desolate figure of that canvas. Man arriving at his estate in pride, in strength, in glory, and fallen there into the clutch of destiny. In his visible aspect he had recovered in a degree; he no longer bore the evidences of extreme fatigue, he walked with the rifle under his arm, and with a casual notice of events.

There is a certain provision of Nature wholly blessed. When one is called to follow that which is dearest to him, nailed up in a coffin, to the grave; when the bitterness of death has wracked the soul to the extreme of physical endurance; then, when under the turn of the screw blood no longer comes, there exudes, instead of it, a divine liquor that numbs the sensibilities like an anæsthetic, and one is able to walk behind the coffin in the road, to approach the grave, to watch the shovelful of earth thrown in, and to come away like other men, speaking of the sun, the harvest, the prospects of the to-morrow; it is not this day that is the deadliest; it is the day to follow—the months,

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the years to follow, when the broken soul has no longer an opiate.

The Duke of Dorset was in the door of life, in that golden age of it when the youth has hardened into the man, when the body has got its glory, and the mind its stature. And he moved here in this forest behind the others, a weapon in his hand, a figure belonging to the picture. He was the leader of the tribe, and its defense against its enemies; but a leader who had lost a kingdom, and whose followers had been put to the sword.

They followed the mountain ridges through the long afternoon, through this ancient, primeval forest. Below, the tops of the fir trees descended into an amphitheater of green, broken by shoulders of the mountain, and farther on into hollows that widened in perspective and filled themselves in the remote distances with haze.

About four o'clock they came out onto the ridge where the two men had first stopped in their journey from the coast. Here was the knoll, rising above them like a hump on the

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ridge, and set about with ancient fir trees; and here below it was the spring of water gushing into its stone bowl. The mountaineer stopped and lifted the Marchesa down from the mule, then he handed the rope bridle to the girl and indicated the spring with a gesture.

“You’ll have to hold Jezebel or she’ll poke her nose in hit first feller,” he said; “I guess I’ll look around some.” Then he went up onto the crest of the knoll.

The Marchesa Soderrelli drank, scooping up the water with her hands; Caroline Childers drank, kneeling, wisps of hair falling beside her slim face into the pool. The Duke of Dorset approached, and remained standing, the butt of the rifle on the ground, his hands resting on the muzzle, watching, in his misery, this sylvan creature come out of the deep places of the wood to drink.

In a few minutes the old circuit rider appeared, and beckoned to the Duke of Dorset. Then he came down a few steps and spoke to the two women.

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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“Don’t be skeered,” he said, “we’re agoin’ to try how the gun shoots.”

Then he went with the Duke up onto the high ground of the ridge. This summit commanded a view of the road ascending the mountain in a long, easy sweep—a beautiful brown ribbon stretched along a bank of scarlet. On this road two figures were advancing, a mile away, like tiny mechanical toys moving up the middle of the ribbon. The old man pointed them out with his finger.

“Them’ll be scouts,” he said. “How fur will your gun carry?”

The Duke of Dorset estimated the distance with his eye.

“One cannot be certain,” he answered; “above six hundred yards.”

“That air purty long shootin’; air you certain the bullet’ll carry up?”

“Quite certain,” replied the Duke.

The old man bobbed his chin, and pointed his finger down the mountain to a dead tree, standing like a mile post on the road.

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## *The Wandering*

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“When they come up to that air fir,” he said, “draw a bead on ’em.”

The Duke of Dorset elevated the sights for five hundred yards, and the two men waited without a word for the tiny toy figures on the velvet ribbon to approach. The knoll on which they stood was elevated above the surrounding wilderness of tree tops. Below, these deep green tops sloped, as though clipped beautifully with some gigantic shears. It was like looking downward over a green cloth with an indolent sun, softened by haze, lying on its surface. The Duke of Dorset stood with one foot advanced, the weight of his body resting on the foot that was behind the other, in the common attitude of one oppressed by fatigue. The old circuit rider stood beside him, bare-headed, his hat on the ground, a faint breeze stirring his gray hair.

The brooding, lonely silence of the afternoon lay on the world. A vagrant breath of wind moved on the ridge, idly through the tops of the ancient firs, but it did not descend into the forest. There, under the blue nimbus, noth-

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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ing moved but the quaint figures traveling on the long brown band. When these two figures began to come up the last sweep of the road toward the dead fir, the Duke of Dorset raised the rifle to his shoulder. The old circuit rider watched him; he observed that the man's hand was unsteady, and that the muzzle of the gun wavered.

"Stranger," he said, "air you one of them shots that wobbles onto your mark?"

Now, there was among the frontiersmen, in the day of the hair trigger, a school of wilderness hunters, to be found at every shooting match, who maintained that no man could hold steadily on an object. They asserted that the muzzle of the rifle should be allowed to move, either in a straight line up or down onto the target, or across it in the arc of a circle. The trigger to be pulled when the line of sight touched on the target. The first disciples of this school were called the "line shots," and the second the "wobblers." Almost every pioneer followed one of these methods, and no more deadly marksmen at short range ever



sighted along a gun barrel. They could drive a nail in with a bullet; they could split the bullet, at a dozen paces, on the edge of an ax; they could pick the gray squirrel out of the tallest hickory at eighty, at a hundred yards, when, lying flat to the limb, it presented a target not higher than an inch.

The Duke took down the rifle. He understood the delicate reference to his nerves.

"Perhaps I would better lie down," he said. Then his eye caught the bullet swinging to its leather string at the old man's middle, and he remembered the history of it. He handed the rifle to the mountaineer. "I am not fit to-day," he said; "will you try?" And he explained the mechanism of the rifle.

The old man took the gun, weighed it in his hands, tried the pull of the trigger, and examined the sights.

"Hit air about the weight of the ole Minie rifle," he said, "an' the sights air fine. Do hit shoot where you hold it?"

"I think it may be depended on at this range," replied the Duke.

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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“Well,” said the old man, “I hain’t shot for a purty long spell, but I’ll jist try it a whet.”

He lifted the gun to his shoulder, pressed his bronzed cheek to the stock, and slipped his left hand out to the full length of the arm under the barrel. The two figures were within a dozen paces of the dead fir tree. The Duke thought one of them was the Japanese whom he had seen watching the château, and the other a forester, but he could not be certain at the distance. For perhaps thirty seconds the mountaineer stood like a figure cast in plaster, then the muzzle of the rifle began slowly to descend, and the report crashed out over the tree tops.

The forester, a little in advance of the other, fell in the road, his head and shoulders doubled up under him. The other, at the report, jumped as high as he could into the air, turned entirely around before he touched the earth, and began to run down the road. He ran, evidently in terror, his legs moving grotesquely on the center of the brown ribbon. The old mountaineer remained unmoving; his left hand far out under the barrel of the rifle, his face set

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to the stock. He moved the bolt and returned his finger to the trigger. Then the rigid muzzle of the rifle began once more to descend, in a dead straight line, and the report followed. The quaint figure, its legs twinkling on the ribbon, shot up into the air, and then fell spraddled out in the road, its arms and legs extended.

The Duke of Dorset turned to the mountaineer.

“My friend,” he said, “that is the best shooting I ever saw—a moving target at more than five hundred yards.”

The old man removed the gun from his shoulder and handed it to the Duke, stopped, picked up his hat and put it on his head. Then he replied to the Duke’s compliment.

“Stranger,” he said, “hit air the Almighty that kills.”

It must be remembered that this man’s God was the God of the Tishbite, who numbered his followers by the companies who drew the sword.

The two men returned at once to the spring, and the little party again set out through the mountains. The plan of travel was now

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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changed. The circuit rider took a trail down the mountain in a direct line to the coast, and he hurried; the trail was at places rough and steep; the injured woman with difficulty kept her place on the pack saddle. They reached the low-lying foot hills, crossed the long broken hollow, dense with thickets, and ascended the next mountain, going due west. The old man traveled as fast as he could; he urged the mule, speaking to it as one might to a careless, lagging child, "Come along, Jezebel; mind where you're walkin'"; and when the mule stumbled, a gentle, scolding note came into his voice, "Pshaw! Jezebel, air your eyes in the back of your head?"

But in spite of the direct route and every effort of the old man they traveled slowly. The sun had gone down when they began the ascent of the second mountain. They stopped for a few minutes, and ate what remained of the food, then they pushed on, climbing toward the summit.

Meanwhile, night descended. A deep-blue twilight emerged from the hollows, the remote

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valleys, the hidden nooks and corners of the wilderness, crept in among the brown trunks of the fir trees, and climbed to the ridges. Then, imperceptibly, as though pigment flowed in, the twilight deepened, the stars came out, and it was night.

They crossed the summit of the second mountain, descended for perhaps three hundred yards, then turned due north and came out abruptly into the great road. The moon was beginning to come up, its hidden disk preceded by a golden haze that feebly lighted the world. The road lay outlined in shadow, running in a long sweep around a shoulder of the mountain on its way to the sea. The four persons continued down this road to the coast. The mountaineer leading the mule, on which the Marchesa Soderrelli rode, and the two others following behind them.

Caroline Childers, walking beside the Duke of Dorset, lagged as though worn out with fatigue. The space between the four persons widened and drew out into a considerable distance. Presently, when the mule turned the



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## *The Gilded Chair*

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shoulder of the mountain, the girl stopped. At the same time, as upon some signal, the moon arose, pouring its silver light into the wilderness over the green tops of the fir trees and down into the road, etching delicate fantastic shadows on the bed of brown fir needles, filtering in among the vines massed on the wall, and turning the dark earth as by some magic into a soft, shimmering, illumined fairy world. The whole wilderness of tree tops rising to the sky was bathed in light. A mist, silvered at its edges, lay on the sea, hiding it, as under an opaque film.

When the girl spoke, her voice hurried as with an explanation.

"You did not understand the Marchesa Soderrelli. She merely wanted us to go on; to save ourselves."

"And you," said the man, "was that your reason, too?"

The girl hesitated. Then she answered, adding one sentence out of sequence to another. "She could not go on. I thought . . . I mean, you could get away alone—but not with us.



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## *The Wandering*

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You had done enough. It was not fair . . . any more. You had a right to your chance . . . to . . . your life."

"To my life!" the man echoed.

"Yes," replied the girl, "I mean your life is worth something. But she . . . but I . . . I have lost so much last night. I have lost . . . I have lost everything. But you . . . everything remains to you. You have lost nothing."

The man made an abrupt gesture with both hands.

"Lost nothing!" he repeated. Then he said the words over slowly, like one stating an absurd, incredible accusation before he answers it, each word distinctly, softly, as though it stood apart from its fellow.

"Lost nothing!"

He took a step or two nearer to the girl. The moon fell on his tall athletic body, projecting a black, distorted shadow on the road. The half of his face was in the light, and it was contracted with despair. The tendons in his hands were visible, moving the doubled fingers. His voice was low, distinct, compact.

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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“I have lost,” he said, “everything, beginning from the day I was born. All the care and labor that my mother took when I was little is lost; all the bread that I have eaten, all the water that I have drunk, all the sun that has warmed me is lost. And the loss does not stop with that. I have lost whatever things the days, arriving one after the other, were bringing to me, except the blessed gift that the last one will bring. I am utterly and wholly ruined.”

The man's words followed, one after the other, as though they were material things, having dimensions and weight.

“Death is nothing. It is life now, that is awful. I shall have to go on when it is no use to go on. I shall have to go on seeing you, hearing your voice, remembering every word you have said, the tone and expression with which you have said it, and every little unimportant gesture you have made. Every day that I live, I shall see and understand more vividly all that I have lost. And it will not get better. It will get worse. Every day I shall see you a little

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more clearly than I did the day before; I shall remember your words a little more distinctly; I shall understand a little more completely all that you would have been to me. And all of this time I shall be alone. So utterly alone that my mind staggers at the thought of it. I love you! I love you! Don't you see, don't you understand how I love you?"

The girl had not moved while the man was speaking.

"Do you love me like that?" she said.

"Yes," he answered.

"And have you loved me all along like that?"

"All along," he said.

"And will you always love me like that?"

"Like that," he said, "although I have lost you."

The girl stood with her arms hanging, her lips parted, her slender face gleaming like a flower, her hair spun darkness. The silence, the vast unending silence, the mystery of a newly minted world, lay about her, as they lay about that first woman, created by Divine enchantment, in the wilderness of Asia.

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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When she spoke again, her voice was so low that the man could hardly hear it. It was like a voice carried by the night over a great distance.

“But you have not lost me,” she said.

Meanwhile, out of the mist, out of that opaque film lying on the sea, a rocket arose, described a great arc, and fell hissing among the tree tops.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### THE CITY OF DREAMS

BUT for the fire burning in the grate, nothing had changed in the dining room at Old Newton. The table was laid with a white cloth to the floor; the same massive bowl, filled with the white grapes of the North, stood in the center of it. Nothing had changed since the Marchesa lunched there, on her way to Oban, except that the light of the morning rather than the mid-day entered through the big windows cut in the south wall. And except that another woman sat there, beyond the Duke of Dorset, at the table — a dark-haired, beautiful woman, in a rose-colored morning gown. Some letters lay beside her plate, and she opened one of them, while the butler moved about, putting breakfast on the sideboard. A fragment of newspaper clipping fluttered out on the cloth. She put her finger on it, but, for the moment, did

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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not take it up. She read the note and then looked across the table smiling.

“The Marchesa is frightfully anxious about our home-coming to Dorset. She says that a real dowager may slur over the details of an ancient custom, but that an adopted dowager must have everything to the letter.”

Then she took up the fragment of newspaper clipping.

“Oh,” she said, “here is something about you,” and she read it aloud.

“‘The speech of the Duke of Dorset, in the House of Lords, a few days ago, in which he urged a dissolution of the Japanese alliance, and, in its stead, a closer relation of all the English-speaking people, was a significant utterance. It is the direct expression of an opinion that has been slowly gathering strength, both here and in the United States of America. It will be recalled that the Duke was on the Pacific Coast at the time of the recent Japanese rising, and was rescued, with his party, by His Majesty’s gunboat *Cleavewaive*. The gunboat had put the Duke ashore on the coast of Oregon,



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## *The City of Dreams*

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on its annual cruise south, in the interest of British shipping and to show the flag, and it returned to pick him up when the Captain learned of the opening of hostilities.

“ ‘It is doubtless true, as the Duke said, that the rising was a first move of Japan in its long-threatened conflict with the United States, and was only rendered abortive by the fact that all the white men of the Pacific Coast, both American and Canadian alike, moved as one people against the Japanese; thereby forcing Great Britain to notify Japan that, in the event of the matter taking on the aspect of a national conflict, she would support her colony.

“ ‘It, perhaps, ought to be added that the personal American alliance which the Duke has recently made may account in some degree for his ardor.’ ”

When she came to the last paragraph of this editorial, the tone of her voice underwent a perceptible change.

“ ‘I should have imagined,” she said, “ that a ‘personal alliance’ would be more seriously regarded in England. I have been told that a

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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marriage is considered in this island to be 'a great hereditary trust in perpetuity.' Do I quote accurately?"

The bronzed man, in his gray tweeds, watching her over the table, gave no sign.

"To the letter," he said. "It is so considered."

"And is it not considered," she continued, "that against the great duties of this trust no mere 'personal inclination' ought to stand?"

"Well," said the Duke, "I should not hold that rule to be always without an exception."

"Really!" she said. "But I suppose it is always the case in England that, when a marriage is being arranged, one ought to follow the direction of one's family, as, for instance, a prince, called to rule a hereditary kingdom, ought to hear his parliament."

"That," said the Duke, "is always the case."

"Always?" There was now another note in her voice.

"Always," replied the Duke. "There should never be an exception to that rule; one ought to marry the woman selected by one's family."

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## *The City of Dreams*

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"I thought," said the Duchess, "that I knew of an exception to the rule. I thought I knew of a man who found a wife for himself."

"I know the case quite well," said the Duke, "and you are mistaken."

"Mistaken!" she said.

"Yes," he said, "there was never in this world a woman more definitely selected by a family than the one you have in mind; there was never in this world a woman that a family made more desperate, unending, persistent efforts to obtain. From the day that the first ancestor saw her in that doomed city, down through generations to the day that the last one saw her on the coast of Brittany, to the day that the living one of this house found her in the bay of Oban, this family has been mad to possess her."

The butler, having placed the breakfast on the sideboard, had gone out. Caroline sat with her fingers linked under her chin.

"But was he sure," she said, "was he sure that this was the woman?"

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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The Duke leaned over and rested his arm on the table.

"How could he doubt it?" he said. "He found her by the sea, and he found, too, the wicked king and the saint of God, and the doomed palace; and, besides that, the longing, the accumulated longing of all those dead men who had seen her, and loved her, and been mad to possess her, was in him, and by this sign he knew her."

"And the others," she said, "all the others, they have received nothing?"

"Nothing," he said.

"And is there one of them here, in this house, that I could see him?"

"The portrait," he said, "of the last one, the one who saw her on the coast of Brittany, is above the mantel in the other room."

"Let us go in and see him," she said.

They arose, leaving the breakfast untasted on the sideboard, and went out along the stone passage, into the other room. It, too, remained the same as on the day that the Marchesa entered it. The high window looking out over the

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## *The City of Dreams*

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fairly village, with the blue-haired ghost dog on his white stone doorstep; and, between, the Ardoch and the road leading to the iron door; and, within, the skins on the floor, the books in their cases, the guns behind the diagonal panes of leaded glass.

They stopped by the fire, under the smoke-stained portrait. For a little while they were silent there, before this ancestor looking down from his canvas. Then the man spoke.

“I think, Caroline,” he said, “that all the love with which these dead men have loved you has been passed on to me. . . . And I think, Caroline, that you are somehow the answer to their longings. . . . I think that with a single consuming passion, one after the other, with an endless longing, these dead men have finally loved you into life—by the power of kisses that touched nothing, longings that availed nothing, loving that returned nothing. . . . And, with all this accumulated inheritance, is it any wonder that every nerve, every fiber, every blood drop of me is steeped in the love of you?”

The woman had remained unmoving, looking

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## *The Gilded Chair*

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at the portrait above the mantel in its smoke-stained frame, now she turned slowly.

“Lift me up,” she said.

He took her up and lifted her from the floor. But the long-withheld reward of that ancestor was denied him. When she came to the level of the man’s shoulders, he suddenly gathered her into his arms. Her eyes closed, her lips trembled, the long sleeves of the morning gown fell away, her bare arms went warm and close around his neck.

And his mouth possessed her.

(1)

THE END



















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